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# MÖRĀN 'ETHŌ

16

PROF.O.M. MATHEW ORUVATTITHARA

## CHURCH AND SACRAMENTS

Reflections of a Layman



ST. EPHREM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SEERI)

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**CHURCH  
AND  
SACRAMENTS**

*Reflections of a layman*

*By*

PROF. O.M. MATHEW ORUVATTITHARA

*Publishers*

ST. EPHREM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
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*Prof. O.M. MATHEW ORUVATTITHARA*

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## **EDITORIAL**

*It is certainly after a long slumber that MORAN ETHO comes awake to greet readers in various parts of the world. We have a feeling of satisfaction that this belated reappearance of our publication is with a valuable contribution to church literature in the form of the reflections of a layman on the Church and its Sacraments. The foreword by Dr. Geevarghese Panicker gives a brief account of the contents of this number and "Teacher's Comment" is an adequate introduction of the author.*

*We hope that our readers will appreciate this issue of MORAN ETHO and benefit by it.*

*Editor*

DEDICATED  
TO  
REV. SR. DR. SOPHY ROSE C.M.C  
The Erudite cum Excellent Teacher  
who  
initiated me into the mysteries of the  
**'MOTHER CHURCH'**  
as well as  
inspired me to pursue studies in  
ECCLESIOLOGY  
and  
to whom I owe most  
for my understanding  
of these subjects

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I acknowledge that I am singularly fortunate to have tutoring on sacred subjects like Ecclesiology and Liturgy, at the Mar Thoma Vidya Niketan, Changanacherry, Kerala, the well reputed Institute of Theology for Laity, affiliated to the St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam. My indebtedness to the 'great Gamaliels' of the academy who spared no efforts to disseminate the vast and wide knowledge in the branch of their specialisation.

In this context, I place on record the respect and obligation to my venerable teacher Rev. Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. of the Vidya Niketan, for her direction and guidance in my academic activities, for the pains she undertook to correct the draft of my book and finally for her comments on it. By dedicating this book of mine at her feet, I feel honoured and satisfied as a student should be.

Rev. Fr. Dr. Joseph Perumthottam, Rev. Fr. Dr. James Palackal, Rev. Sr. Dr. Prasanna Vazheeparambil C.M.C., the Director, the Joint Director and the Registrar respectively of the Mar Thoma Vidya Niketan, are thanked most sincerely for their evaluation and constructive criticism of this work of their student. As far as possible, I have complied with the thinking of these eminent professors of mine. Also, I must thank the co-students for their co-operation, in this endeavour.

To Rev. Fr. Dr. Geevarghese Panicker of the St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, Kottayam, I offer most sincere thanks and esteem. Really, the learned Father has rendered an invaluable service to me. Very studiously he scrutinized my book, altered its style and structure most befittingly. Besides, he has honoured me by furnishing a very scholarly and scientific foreword for the book.

My thanks to Rev. Fr. V.M. Gheevarghese Kalloppambal, Pallom, Kottayam, the former cleric Trustee of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Kerala, under the Holy See of Antioch, for his services in my attempt to bring forth this Book. He very patiently perused the draft of the book and provided me with worthwhile suggestions on the Sacramental Theology of the Syrian Church.

The analysis and the appreciation that Rev. Fr. Dr. K.G. Pothan, professor of Theology and Ecclesiology, Mar Thoma Syrian Theological Seminary, Kottayam, was kind enough to make, are acknowledged hereby. I value very much his positive comments on my treatment of the theological and Trinitarian aspects of Ecclesiology and his enlightenment on the Protestant perspectives of these topics.

Services rendered by Smt. Susheela Jacob and Sri. C.M. George, the Librarian and Asst. Librarian of the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam are remembered with gratitude. Very earnestly did both of them search the archives and make accessible to me the books, periodicals and other documents needed for my work. So also, members of the staff of the libraries of the St. Ephrem Research Institute, Kottayam and the Mar Thoma Vidya Niketan helped me. My thanks to them too. My gratitude to my dear student Kum. Baby Veena of the School of Indian Legal Thought, M.G. University, Kottayam, for the laborious work of transcribing the M.S. and making it legible

for the D.T.P. process. A word of thanks is due to the 'Graphic System' of Kottayam that brought out the D.T.P. of the book, not on commercial motive but on the principle of customer satisfaction.

I shall be guilty of ingratitude if I do not record a few words about the great services, the members of my family rendered in this exacting enterprise. In this list, I must reverentially remember what all did my lovable father, the late Sri. O.M. Mathew (Senior) transmit to me. It was he who imbued in me the incisive interest on 'Mother Church'. Although he was not a theologian, he was nevertheless well versed in the History of the Church, especially of the 'St. Thomas Christians' of Kerala. The articles that he published and the discussion that he had had with me did create in my outlook a noble concept about the Ecclesia. I must proudly accept that the 'seeds' that he implanted in my mind during the formative period, sprouted out in the 'fullness of time', at the congenial environs of the Mar Thoma Vidya Niketan.

My wife Jolly Mathew, sons Angiras, Brighu, Kashyp, sisters Walsa, Lizzy and mother Sosamma deserve gratitude and special thanks in no mean measure for the varied and valuable help in this venture. During periods of drudgery and monotony, the natural concomitants of continuous reading and cogitation, they certainly kept up my wits and buoyed up my spirits by poignant discussion and positive thought on allied subjects. But for their selfless co-operation, this work would not have been finished at all. I thank my dutiful wife Jollyamma, especially for having corrected painstakingly the proof of the book, re-arranged its style of presentation and brought it out without mistakes and defects.

The magnanimity and magnificance that impelled Rev. Fr. Dr. Jacob Thekkeparambil, the Director of St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute

Kottayam, to limelight this book are too great to be concised in a few words. I verily vouch that though I belong to the Syrian Orthodox Church, Fr. Jacob and 'SEERI' have profusedly showered on me the spirit of 'Ecumenism' which is the ideal of the Institute and the dynamics of its Director. For me, he has proved himself to be the right person at the right context. My obligation to him is obvious. But for his proffer to publish this book, through SEERI, Kottayam, it would not have been in the reach of the readers. My immense thanks to Fr. Jacob for the gesture of 'charity' that he has extended to me.

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5-11-2001

## FOREWORD

Prof. O.M. Mathew, amidst his multifarious activities - academic, social and political - has found time to attend classes in theology and to get himself involved in theological thinking. This book 'Church and Sacraments' is the result of his study of theology and of his wide reading.

The first chapter, is an attempt to discuss the Church in terms of Bible and Tradition. The second chapter, is a lengthy discourse about the Trinitarian dimension of the Church. In this section he could have clarified the Pneumatological dimension of the Church. In Western theology, Pneumatology is often presented as a function of Ecclesiology, while really speaking Ecclesiology is a function of Pneumatology. The third chapter, is concerned with the four essential marks or "notae" of the Church. The fourth and fifth chapters, treat the Sacraments in general and the Seven Sacraments in particular. The background and perspective of his discussion is that of Western Scholastic theology. The author, however, has not followed the overstress on the institutional and juridical aspects of the Church, usually found in the Ecclesiological treatises in the Western Church. The dogmatic aspects of the Church's relation to the Holy Trinity and the relation of the Seven Sacraments to the Church as Sacrament of Christ have been dealt with in the last two chapters.

The author, though not a professional theologian nor a member of the Western Church, has clearly understood some of the principles found in the Ecclesiology of the early Church Fathers: principles such as the relation of the Church to the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the relation of the Holy Eucharist to the Church. The communion aspect of the Church and the Pneumatological aspect of the Church, greatly stressed in the

Oriental Churches could have been brought in. The topics discussed in each chapter may appear to the ordinary reader as heavily loaded with the abstract notions of a scholastic theological discourse.

The author has tried, at least in an implicit manner, to view the Church not as a "Power" or "Jurisdiction" but as a "Sacramental" organism. The author, though not expressed in clear terms, seems to have realized that the institution, essential as it is for the Church as sign and Sacrament, cannot be simply identified with the Church. As institution the Church is of 'this world', as fulfilment she is of "the world to come". The whole purpose of the institution is precisely to make fulfilment possible, to reveal as present that which is to "come". The fulfilment is impossible without the institution, just as the institution receives all its meaning from that which it fulfils. What this means however, is that the Church's visible, institutional structure - episcopate, canonical order, etc. - is a structure not of power, but of presence. It exists in order to answer the fullness of that presence and its continuity in space and time, its identify and 'sameness' always and everywhere. Her only mission is to reveal and "represent", to make present in this world, the Kingdom which is not of this world, and for the sake of which those who "possess should be as if they possessed not".

An important point to remember in any study of Ecclesiology is its relation to the whole of theology. The Church is the mystery of the new creation and she is the mystery of the Kingdom. It has often been said that there is no ecclesiology in the modern sense of the word, in the writings of the Church Fathers. The reason for this is not a lack of interest in the Church, but the Fathers' understanding and experience of the Church, as the new life of the new creation and the presence, the Parousia of the

Kingdom. Their attention is not focused on the "institution" because the very nature and purpose of that institution is not to exist "in itself" but to be the "Sacrament", the "epiphany" of the new creation. In this sense, their whole theology is ecclesiological, for it has the Church, the experience of the new life, the communion of the Holy Spirit, as its source and context. From this point of view, as the Russian Theologian Schmemmann has said, "the post Tridentine treatise 'De Ecclesia', mother and pattern of all modern ecclesiology both Western and Eastern, is indeed the downfall of Patristic ecclesiology, for, by focusing attention almost exclusively on the institution, it obscures the cosmical and eschatological nature of the Church". It makes "institution" an end in itself, and in doing this, in apparently exalting the Church, it in fact mutilates her, making her as we see it today (among many theologians) more and more "irrelevant" for the world, less and less, "expressive" of the "Kingdom of God."

As an attempt of a person who has laboured to understand the theology of the Church, Prof. Mathew seems to have succeeded to understand what the Church really is. The reduction of the Church to a merely human society is the bane of the age. Consequently many of the so called theologians evaluate the Church and her faith and life in terms of the World, of its ideologies, and philosophies, of its trends and of its needs, and thus ultimately surrender ecclesiology to the cultural, philosophical and ideological categories of the World. The World should be judged in terms of the Trinitarian Communion which the Church is. As Cyprian says, Church is "a people made one in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". This idea has been well brought out by Prof. Mathew in this book.

I am sure that this book will give an incentive to students of theology for a more detailed study of ecclesiology. I congratulate Prof. Mathew for his maiden attempt to present his theological insights in a book form. This book, I hope, will provoke other students of theology to study ecclesiology in relation to theology and to become convinced that all theology is ecclesial.

SEERI,  
Baker Hill,  
Kottayam.  
30-10-2001

**Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Panicker**  
Formerly  
Rector & President, St. Joseph's  
Pontifical  
Institute of Theology & Philosophy,  
Alwaye.

## TEACHER'S COMMENT

"Seek, you will find" (Mt.7:7). Those who have an inner urge to find only will seek. This is a reality. Prof. O.M. Mathew is a seeker since he has an ardent desire to find the real truth. This book 'Church and Sacraments' is a visible expression of his earnest seeking and I believe that he has found out what he searched or sought for.

Prof. O.M. Mathew, is a Syrian Orthodox Christian having many faceted responsibilities. Though he is a retired college professor of 38 years of experience, he is still teaching Politics in the School of Indian Legal Thought of Mahatma Gandhi University. The Government of India has nominated him to the Board of Directors, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, which is a Deemed University. Amidst his teaching career he spares time to study theology in a Catholic Institute (Mar Thoma Vidyanikethan Higher Institute of Religious Sciences For Laity, Changanacherry, Kerala) where I teach, and to do some research in his own way with keen interest and dedication. At the same time he is always ready to seek clarification and guidance from his teachers. As the first one who introduced him to the world of Theology and Ecclesiology, I have great appreciation towards him precisely because of his earnest search for truth and the willingness and readiness to make others aware of the real truth. This book is an outcome of his studies in the class and his wide reading of books from different libraries. He collected the necessary information, interiorised and articulated them like a scholar in this book and submitted it to me for correction and evaluation. He has done all these not only for his own sake but also for the benefit of his community and the people at large. What a wonderful and charitable act! May the Lord of all grant him reward for his laborious work.

So, Prof. Mathew, my earnest student, with deep sense of appreciation, I congratulate you wholeheartedly! With your scholarly work you have glorified the Institute you study and each and every one who taught you. Thank you so much! May the Almighty God bless you and let your pen move more along with your heart and mind to proclaim the Eternal Truth who lives and reigns in His Mystical body, the Church, the community of believers redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Let the Holy Trinity and the 'icon of the Trinity', ie, Church, be glorified through you and your further contributions!

Holy Queen's Convent,  
Changanacherry.  
22-10-2001

**Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose C.M.C.**

## INTRODUCTION

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This verse, as everyone is well aware, is the opening one in the Gospel according to John. What did, does and will the 'Word' do for humanity? Opinions vary. One of the answers, however, is that the 'Word' was manifested, is being manifested and will be manifested through His Body, the Ecclesia or Church.

Naturally the lay men and women have the duty and the right to be concerned with the Church wherein dwells Christ the Lord in His eternal glory and everlasting majesty. This book is an attempt to provide a general idea on Church and Sacraments. Hence it will be catalogued in Ecclesiology. As and when required, views of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches have been compared and contrasted in all fairness possible. I hope this work will swell the spirit of the students of the subject 'Ecclesiology' and make them more committed to the Church.

The earthly Ecclesia or the visible Church is not a man-made society. Jesus Himself founded Her. It should not be forgotten, however, that even before this marvel occurred, the Ecclesia had been existing with the 'Father' in the celestial world. So She is co-eval with Creation. The earthly Ecclesia is yet to attain fulfilment. This will take place at the eschata. Presently therefore, the Church is progressing on Her pilgrimage to Parousia under the guidance of the all perfecting Paraclete or Holy Spirit. Thus in short the Church is rooted in the Trinitarian 'Father', manifested through the 'Son' and directed by the 'Spirit'. And verily the Ecclesia is hailed the integral part of the 'Salvific Plan' of the Triune God. This is no casual conjecture or figment of fancy, but the assurance that the 'God intoxicated' saints, holy prophets and the meek in heart were blessed to receive through Revelation and the Tradition, enshrined in the Holy Bible and Patristic Literature.

The Church is what She is not only because of Her divine origin but also due to Her essential characteristics named 'notae' or marks. There are four of them. They are confessed by the members of the Church in the 'Creeds'. These Creeds formulate the Faith of the Church besides fortifying faith in the Church. Undoubtedly, there can never be a meaningful Christian life without conforming to the credal doctrines of the Ecclesia.

Christ, the High Priest and the King, chose the Church as His Bride and offered Her the dowry of His 'blood and flesh' at the Cross. Apparently He authorised the Ecclesia to be the perennial source of Salvation. He is still sanctifying Her. The means adopted for this holy act as well as for bidding every one to be the heir apparent in His Spiritual Kingdom are the Holy Sacraments, theologically termed, the 'means of grace'.

Saul of Tarsus never caused any wound on the physical body of the Nazerene. For, when Saul began to 'breath threats and murder' against the followers of Christ, the Lord, Jesus had already resurrected and ascended to the right hand side of His Father in heaven. Still, the 'voice' sternly asked Saul on his way to Damascus for destroying the disciples of Jesus, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me". Why? The answer is obvious. It was because the injury that Saul inflicted on each and every soul who was following the 'Way' was on the Corpus of Christ. When Saul became Paul, consequent to the 'Christ experience', he brought in the grand concept that the 'Assembly of believers' or the Church or the Ecclesia is the 'mystical body' of Jesus Christ. He further expatiated that in this body of Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female, neither rich nor poor, but all are One. This is the basis of the doctrines of the Universality of Salvation and the Catholicity of the Church.

Church Fathers and theologians of antiquity too, have developed the theme that in Church, temporal distinctions become irrelevant, once the Christian life is experienced. In brief, Ecclesia is corporate in Her essence, existence and errand. 'Individuality' in its true tenor as indivisibility will be realised only when oneness with Christ through the Ecclesia is attained. Then alone will the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, the core of Christ's teachings, be actualised.

The 'historic' Jesus makes His presence felt in history through the Ecclesia. Devotion to and understanding of the Church are the essential elements for the experiencing of God. Familiarity with the Church is in fact the first factor for fostering faith in and faithfulness to the Almighty.

I must make an apology at this juncture. I do admit that my grasp of and grip over Ecclesiology, Theology, Liturgy and other allied subjects are rudimentary. Nonetheless, I ventured to bring forth this book as I firmly believe that knowledge of the 'Mother Church' is imperative for the knowledge of the Triune God. I am conscious that I have trodden only along the periphery of the subject. I am no professional theologian either. Hence this book, 'Church and Sacraments' is qualified 'Reflections of a layman', not as a caveat but as a confession.

"If thou would'st master strain and pain,  
Unfold this book read and reflect on,  
Its 'ecclesial' leaves, therein thou soon shall see,  
The past, the present and the days to be".

## **LIST OF TOPICS ANALYSED**

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## CHAPTER I

# CHURCH, BIBLE AND TRADITION

### 1. The Beginning, Being and Becoming of the Ecclesia

The Most Holy Trinity is the primordial reality from which, upon which, and through which, the Ecclesia or the Church springs forth, develops and attains completion. It implies that God the Father reveals, Christ the Son, sanctifies and Paraclete the Spirit, fulfils the Ecclesia. The idea is that even before the Ecclesia was established on the earth, She was existing in the celestial world and She would be in her full glory in the 'Kingdom of God' which is yet to be realized in the future. Hence, it is asserted that the Ecclesia has Her beginning, being and becoming in the Trinitarian God. Lord Christ has given the Ecclesia the promise of indefectability, through His words to St. Peter, as recorded in Mt. 16:18. "... the powers of death shall not prevail against it."

### 2. 'A mystery hidden for all ages'

As the Triune God is a mystery, so is the Ecclesia. This is the theological and ecclesiological perspective and not the historical view or juridical judgement. Ecclesiologists emphasise that the Church was a mystery in the dead yesterday. She is equally so, in the living today. In the unborn tomorrow too, She would be no less a riddle. St. Paul's remark, 'a mystery hidden for all ages' is absolutely apt for the Ecclesia. The term 'mysterion' is seen in almost all the writings of St. Paul. Important instances are, 1 Cor 2, Rom 11, 16, Col 1, 2, 4, Eph. 1, 3, 5. A mystery is something that man experiences, the content of which however, cannot be

comprehended in its entirety. Therefore, humans cannot explain the mystery of Ecclesia by easily understandable terms and technics. Besides the Cross, different symbols, imageries and images are naturally employed to explain the divergent aspects of the Ecclesia. Church is depicted in the Liturgical prayers and the writings of the 'Fathers', as bride, mother, daughter, ship, haven, flock of sheep, God's plantation etc. It was a common practice among Syrian Fathers to make use of such symbols. But these images did not originate from the flights of fancy of these saintly prelates. They have their antecedents in the Scripture.

### **3. An oasis in life's wilderness**

It is through the Ecclesia that God unfolds His integral and inexplicable 'plan of salvation'. Consequently, the Church is christened the 'locus or spring of salvation' by the 'Church Fathers'. In 1 Tim 3:15, 6:36, and 16:19, St. Paul pays glowing tributes to the Church. He remarks "it is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is also the fold within which Christ's sheep are safe from the wolves; the Holy Spirit being its supreme teacher and protector". St. Ephrem the Syrian, who was declared a doctor of the Church by Pope Benedict XV, in 1920, compares the Church to the Paradise planted on earth by the Lord Himself. Undoubtedly, the Church is a blessing bestowed on man by his maker. Life, without or outside the Church is aimless, rudderless, hollow, solitary and squalid. The Church is man's bosom friend, companion in solitude, a mother in all seasons of distress, an oasis in life's wilderness and the intercessor in his life in the world to come. All these affectionate attitudes of the Church are evident in the precepts and practices of Her Sacraments. Certainly, the Church is the solace of man in his life here, and She would be the solace in his life hereafter as well. Therefore, it can be said metaphorically, that the Ecclesia is a buckle that binds, a hyphen that joins the terrestrial and celestial lives. In the Ecclesia, man makes meaningful relationship with the glorious company of the Apostles, the godly fellowship of the Prophets, the glowing

army of martyrs and the holy community all throughout the world.

#### 4. Different angles of study

Ecclesiology is the study of Ecclesia or the Church. The Catholic Encyclopaedia explains Ecclesiology as that branch of theology that seeks to give a scientific disposition of the faith of the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas, in his magnum opus or great work 'Summa Theologica', which, in the opinion of the celebrated Anglican theologian John Macquarrie 'is the greatest systematic theology ever constructed' asks the question whether theology is a science. He himself answers, that it is. This is recorded in Ia, I, 2 of 'Summa Theologica'. But, it must be borne in mind that theology is not a science like Chemistry or Zoology. Rather, it belongs to the category of 'human sciences'. It is accepted that there are critics who oppose the usage 'science' to qualify theology. Their argument obviously is that the subject matter of theology is religion which is based not on the faculty of reason. It is well to remind such people, as to what the great philosopher, Immanuel Kant of Germany wrote in 'Religion within the limits of Reason alone' and what William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury noted in his book, 'Nature, Man and God'. According to Kant "..... for a religion which rashly declares war on reason will not be able to hold out in the long run against it." To Temple, "Revelation can and in the long run must, on pain of becoming manifest as superstition, vindicate its claim by satisfying reason". Yet, as a compromise, theology may best be described as a 'divine' science. That is, even if its content will be 'reasonable', it may not be absolutely 'rational' in approach. Theology can become intelligible only when expressed in languages of the culture in which it is attempted to be explained. With these cautionary notes, it may be said that it attempts to analyse and assess from different angles, God's revelation and 'Salvific Plan', as worked through the Church. Naturally, it becomes a systematic study of the foundation and fruition, essence and elements, tenets and traditions of the 'One, Holy, Apostolic

and Catholic' Church. Yet, in the middle ages, before the Reformation, there was hardly any systematic investigation into Ecclesiology among the writers of the West. This omission is found in the writings of ancient Eastern theologians like Aphrahat the 'wise', also called the 'Persian Sage' and St. Ephrem as well. It might have been because of the pre-occupation of these 'Fathers' to combat various heresies that haunted the Church. With regard to the conception of the Church among West Syrians the scholarly Rev. Fr. Dr. Geevarghese Panicker remarks in his study, 'The Church in the Syriac Tradition', as follows: "It is not possible to find any systematic treatise on the Church, ie Ecclesiology, among these Syrians..... The Syrian liturgy is in fact a monument of love and enthusiasm of the Syrians for the Holy Church, the spouse of Christ and the mother of the children of God.... The Church is often praised in the hymns, in the prayers, by a rich language of words and images..... It is not at all easy to extract from the lyrical effusion, the proper theological content". The learned Father further comments, "the Syrians in their teaching about the essence of the Church, have never gone beyond a general tendency and have not arrived at a systematic penetration of the theme". On the conception of the Church, according to the Assyrian Church of the East, sometimes called 'Nestorians', the observation of Rev. Panicker in the reference cited above is quite authoritative. He opines that among the East Syrians, a systematic treatise on the Church is as rare as it is among the Jacobites. Abdiso of the 14th century, is the only author who deals with the Church. In fact it is only a short chapter in the 'Book of the Pearl', his main theological work. In the present-day theological circles, thanks to the re-discovery of the 'resources' of the Church, Ecclesiology has begun to attract the attention of scholars, students, ecclesiologists and theologians, the world over.

## 5. 'Summum Bonum'

Pope Paul VI, in his Encyclical 'Ecclesiam Suam' very candidly expressed the view, that knowledge of the Church, which is our 'Mother' par excellence, is imperative for loving Her. The 'Divine dispensation' becomes comprehensible only through the Ecclesia, by sweet, silent and steady reflections on Her. By such an endeavour, man gains the experiential knowledge and faith necessary for spiritual enlightenment, which is the 'summum bonum' of the life of man on earth. It is man's common experience that love grows by intimate knowing. Love towards the 'Mother Church' would certainly lead to what the great mystic of the 15th century, St. Thomas A Kempis calls 'true understanding' of the Lord in his religious classic, 'Of the Imitation of Christ'. The contention of St. Cyprian of Carthage, also is worth quoting. "He alone can have God as the Father, who first has the Church as the Mother". Origen, the 3rd century intellectual giant of the Theological Academy at Alexandria, also expresses an identical idea. According to him, he who does not have the Church for Mother cannot have God for Father.

## 6. Sources of Ecclesiology

The Holy Bible and 'The Tradition' are the two authoritative primary sources, both of Ecclesiology and Theology. The term 'theology', is a combination of two Greek words, 'theos' and 'logos', meaning respectively 'God' and 'Word'. The Greek word 'Theologia' from which the English word theology is derived, was first used by the Greek philosopher, Plato. For him and for the Greeks, 'Theology' meant the fundamental interpretation or knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. It was Origen, who gave a Christian connotation to the term 'theology'. Yet, it was only in the 12th century A.D., that 'theology', as a science of God, was popularised by Peter Abalard of France. Theology may mean 'Word of God', ie, the Scripture or 'Word' about God. In popular parlance this is the sense of theology. As a subject of enquiry it signifies the scientific search of faith. This is what is conveyed in the famous words of Anselm of Canterbury:-

"It is faith, seeking understanding". In other words, theology is an attempt to 'make sense' of the faith experience. The same view was expressed by St. Augustine, when he said, "We desire to know what we believe". The remark of the well reputed Anglican theologian, John Macquarrie in his celebrated work, 'The Principles of Theology' is quite appealing. "Theology may be defined as the study, which through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available". While the West emphasises on learning and outstanding wisdom as the traits of a theologian, the East upholds a life of contemplation and meditation as the marks of a master of theology. According to Evagrius of Pontus, "whoever prays is the theologian". Interestingly, the ethos is echoed in the oft-quoted words of Melanchthon, Lutheranism's first systematic theologian. "To know Christ, is not to speculate about the mode of His Incarnation, but to know His saving benefits". To quote John Macquarrie, again, "Theology aims at making the faith of the Church coherent, and applying this coherent faith to the problems which man encounters in every day life". According to Macquarrie, there are six formative factors for theology, although they all are not to be regarded on the same level. They are, experience, revelation, Scripture, tradition, culture and reason. Thus have come into existence, different kinds of theologies, like theologies of experience and theologies of revelation, rational theologies and biblical theologies, theologies oriented to the traditional teaching of the Church, and the theologies that seek the maximal degree of accommodation to prevailing cultural forms. To sum up, theology is an exploration after God, and Ecclesiology is the adjunct of theology.

## **7. Origin of the term 'The Bible'**

The origin and development of the term 'The Bible' are from 'Biblos'. It was the name of a trading port of ancient Phoenicia. One of the main items of export, from there, was a sheet-like substance, on which writing could be done, as was possible on the papyrus invented by the Egyp-

tians. In due course, the material itself as well as the bunch of it made into the form of a book, came to be called 'Biblos'. The Greeks soon developed two different terms, namely 'biblion' and 'biblos' for using as the singular and plural, respectively. Subsequently, the Greek definite article 'Ta' was prefixed. Thus, the term 'Ta Biblion' meaning 'The Book', came into usage. Somehow, the term 'The Book' began to be used for 'The Holy Book', signifying 'The Bible'.

#### **8. No Bibliolatry - The warning of the Church**

The Bible scholar Lucas Grollenberg starts his masterly study, 'Rediscovering the Bible' with the following fascinating narrative. "When our grand parents were young, they could find out very easily whether or not someone was still a believing Christian. They only had to ask this question. 'Did Moses write the first five books of the Bible or not?' If the person answered 'No', then there was no doubt about it. He had abandoned his Christian faith"! No such acid test holds good today, as the idiom 'probability' has become idiotic in the wake of the phrase 'proof'. Times have changed. Rational man has found many mistakes and discrepancies in the Bible. The incongruities and apparent contradictions of content and context in the Bible are, however, being solved by that branch of study called 'Higher Criticism of the Bible'. Scholars of this discipline clarify, that the Bible is certainly the 'Word of God', but nonetheless, the 'work of man'. Differently put, it is the 'Word of God' expressed in human language with all the latter's limitations to convey metaphysical ideas and supernatural things. It should not be forgotten, that in the formation of the Bible, a lot of poetic imaginations, imageries, allegories, fictions, fables etc. from different cultures and even the history of many nations must have influenced the mental make-up of the authors, compilers and even editors. Biblical scholars opine that the Pentateuch is a compilation from four different sources called the Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomy, and the Priestly; the book of Jonah is a fable; book of Job is

from a Babylonian folklore; the book of Isaiah is authored by three scribes, who lived at different periods; Psalms are from the pen of many a person including poets. Therefore, these savants remind the reader that each consonant and vowel of the Bible should not be deemed as inspired and impeccable. Otherwise, the student of the Bible may fall into the whirlpool of blind biblicism, and its degenerate form bibliolatry. In studying and interpreting the Bible, the following three variable factors shall not be lost sight of. They are, the intellectual insight, the emotional tone and the environment of the authors. This is the ever repeated reminder of the episcopal Churches like the Catholic and Orthodox. The 'left wingers', however, stick on to the literal interpretation.

### **9. The Bible is human, yet holy**

It is true that the Bible does not provide philosophical arguments or scientific proofs for theism. The reason is obvious. The Hebrew prophets and Christian apostles were not interested in philosophy or science. Neither Judaism, nor Christianity was established upon the foundation of logic. They never asked whether God exists. They witnessed God as 'active', amid the movements and events, experiences and expectations collectively called History. But this secular history was seen by them, in the framework of 'sacred' history. The Bible has a special view of History. It sees the intervention of God in the affairs of men. Through the socio-political and religio-cultural events, especially of certain regions of the Fertile Crescent, the Bible brings forth the 'Salvation History' of mankind. So, the central theme of the Bible is the 'History of Salvation'. Through the stuff of human history, they heard God's self-revealing word. And, these humble but great men obeyed the Divine dictates, unlike what the first man did. It is universally vouched that the Bible contains the 'Word of God' as sounded from His historic revelation to the Hebrew nation and the Apostles of the Christian Church. The words of the Bible are authored by humans not to divorce God from them, but to bring Him more intimately

into them. Therefore, the Bible is hailed holy. The authority of the Bible is absolute, as it unfolds God's Salvation plan and contains the immutable but benevolent message to mankind. One must study the Bible to know the mind of God and obey His commands. It can be asserted beyond doubt, that all the counsels needed for man's ethical life, faith and salvation are set down in the Scripture, either explicitly or implicitly. The Bible is a seamless garment, woven by criss-cross spinning of moral teaching and theology. Even so, it is part of the magisterium of the Church, the hierarchy and the laity included, to interpret the 'Word' as to make it a 'Living Word' for Her children. Otherwise, the Bible may be treated by critics and sceptics as outdated and obsolete. The reminder by John Robinson, to the 'Pilgrim Fathers', as they set sail to America, in search of green pastures, is worthy of citing. "The Lord has more Truth, yet to break forth, out of His holy Word." In studying the Bible, one need not always accept Rudolf Bultmann's 'demythologizing' method; but must adopt, the archaeological approach. That is, as an archaeologist removes the layers of the earth one by one to unearth the hidden treasures, so should a student of the Bible do. He or she should delve, as it were, into the depth of the words, especially those which are repeated, which are in the form of questions, metaphors, puzzles, and which describe times and days, to get the clues of the meanings.

#### **10. Old Testament 'Types' indicative of New Testament Ecclesia**

The OT was compiled for the first time, only in the 3rd century B.C. It was named the 'Septuagint', as it is traditionally attributed to 70 rabbis of Alexandria. The Roman numerals LXX are used to indicate it. However, St. Augustine in his book, 'City of God' mentions that the number is 72. His narrative is interesting and informative. The second Ptolemy of Egypt, by name Philadelphus asked Eleazar, the then Jewish High Priest, to send scholars to translate the Scriptures of the Jews. Six men, from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, 72 in all, were thus deputed for the work. The language

used was Greek. Biblical scholars suggest that many an antecedent found in the OT was considered by the Apostolic and Patristic tradition, as 'type' indicative of the NT Ecclesia with its earthly mission and eschatological fulfilment. Both the Apostles and the Church Fathers treated, God's dwelling on Mt. Sinai as a 'type' of Christ's eternal presence in the Ecclesia. For St. Peter, Noah's Ark symbolised the sacrament of baptism. St. Ephrem, presents the 'OT Tabernacle' as the archetype of the NT Church. The slaughtering of the lamb, by Moses, was a prolepsis of the 'Supreme Sacrifice' of the Saviour Christ. For Tertullian, the theologian of antiquity, there was complete "harmony between the prophetic and dominical utterances". In Origen's opinion "the dogmas common to the so called Old and New Testaments form a symphony".

### **11. Sunagogue and Ecclesia**

It can be legitimately and logically reiterated that the Ecclesia of the NT period has its 'shadow' in the OT. The Hebrew Bible designated it 'Qahal Yahweh'. Literally this term stands for the 'assembly of Yahweh'. In this context, it is worthwhile to remember that in the Pentateuch and other early texts of the Hebrew Bible, it is the word 'Edah' that is used for 'Qahal'. But this word 'Edah' disappeared from the living language of the Hebrew people of the post-exile period. In its place, the term 'Qahal' gained currency. Both the Babylonian and Jerusalem versions of the 'Talmud' testify this. The words 'Sunagogue' and 'Ecclesia' are used in the Septuagint, interchangeably, to signify the 'Edah'. In the LXX, the term Ecclesia is used in 96 contexts, while the name sunagogue is found at as many as 215 places. The English word synagogue is derived from the Greek term sunagogue.

### **12. Constitutive Elements of the Ecclesia or Church**

The English word, Church comes from the Greek word 'Kyriakon' which means 'that which belongs to the Lord'. This word is used only

twice in this context in the NT; once to designate the 'Lord's Supper' as found in I Cor. 11:20 and the other, in speaking of the 'Lord's Day', in Rev. 1:10. But, 'Church' is especially used as the translation of another NT word, 'Ecclesia'. It describes the 'people' who belong to the Lord, and not 'that which belongs'. This term Ecclesia is one of the favourite words of the NT, being used 115 times; but only in two contexts in the Gospels, and that too in the Gospel of Mt. itself 16:18 and 18:17. In the NT, all but once, 'Ecclesia' is used in a religious sense. This exception is in 'Acts' 19:32 where the sense is secular and legal. Four different shades of meaning can be attributed to the term Ecclesia. Denoting a liturgical sense; meaning a local assembly or church; as another word for hierarchy; an organised Church, signifying the universal or catholic or mystical aspect. The expression 'Ecclesia' comes from the Greek roots 'Ek' and 'Kaleein' meaning respectively 'out' and 'to call'. It meant those who were 'called out'. According to the 'Catechetical lectures' 18:22-28 of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the Ecclesia is a spiritual society which God called into existence, to replace the Jewish Church which conspired against Christ. Originally, Ecclesia had only a political purport or secular significance. Etymologically, it did not denote a religious assembly for the performance of any ritualistic act or worship. Ecclesia meant rather, an assemblage of free men or citizens. In ancient Greece, a civil servant who was designated the 'herald' used to go through the streets 'calling' the citizens 'out' to assemble at some public place, like the market or the courtyard of a temple, where they would debate whatever was on the agenda. Generally it was to discuss the civil and political matters concerning the city states called 'Polis' that such assemblies were held. While women and slaves were legally excluded from these meetings, it was the bounden duty of every citizen, above twenty years of age, to attend them. As time rolled on, the two terms 'Ecclesia' and 'Sunagogue', became more and more differentiated in 'Judaistic thought', Sunagogue came to signify the 'people'

as such, with all their follies and frailties. On the other hand, Ecclesia gained a religious connotation. So it was specified as an assembly for performing rites and rituals related to God or religion. To expatiate, 'Ecclesia' conveyed the idea that God called them in a special way, to belong to Him in a unique manner. On scrutiny, five distinguishing features of the Ecclesia, can be discerned from this description. They are, the 'Caller', 'the Called', the 'purpose of calling', the 'mediator' and the 'relation' between the 'Caller' and the 'Called'. In the OT, Yahweh or God is the 'Caller'. The 'Called' obviously, is Abraham and his progeny, the 'Israel'. They have to belong to Yahweh as His 'Chosen people'. Moses is the 'Mediator'. The relation between the 'Caller' and the 'Called' is one of 'sonship'. The 'call' is followed by a promise of God to Abraham: "by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed". This "Call" marks the first transformation of the celestial or 'Heavenly Ecclesia' on to the earth. God is thus, the initiator of even the earthly Ecclesia. God's promise and Abraham's acceptance of it with unfaltering faith and steadfast hope, together created the 'communion' which is another hallmark of the Ecclesia. From the Book of Exodus, the evolution of the Ecclesia can be gathered. God revealed His holy name, 'Yahweh' through the 'Mediator' Moses at Mt. Sinai. Israel becomes a 'covenanted' people. Circumcision was made the sign of the covenant. Covenant is a wider concept than contract. In the former, the mutual relation between the parties is emphasised, while this is lacking in the latter. In other words, in a covenant, the covenanter loves and protects the covenanted; the latter in turn, obeys and worships the former. This reciprocity is conspicuously absent in contract. In the words of Rev. Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose, "God and His people became bound by an interlocking intimacy". This is what is expressed in the Book of Leviticus. "I shall be your God and you shall be my people". As a mark of confirmation, Moses slays a lamb and offers it as a sacrifice for the Lord. He then sprinkled part of its blood at the altar and the remaining portion

on the people assembled. By these rituals, the 'Chosen people' became not merely a believing community but a worshipping community or an Ecclesia in the religious sense. It is in remembrance of this event, that the Psalmist of later times bursts out in rhapsody. "They sung to the Lord a new song of praise". All the constitutive elements of the OT Ecclesia, namely, the 'Word of God', the response of the 'Called' expressed through 'venerable worship' and filiality, as well as the role of the 'Mediator', are accepted by the NT also. In fact, the NT Ecclesia upheld and honoured all these and other constituents with greater perfection and intensity. God is the 'Caller', Christ is the 'Mediator', the Apostles are the 'Called', 'right of succession', is the 'sonship' specified in the OT, the establishment of the Ecclesia is the obvious 'purpose'. To conclude, we can be certain that the NT is the interpretation of the OT, and in the crowning glory of the 'Christ-Event', which established the Ecclesia on the earth all the OT episodes are fulfilled. It is only in the fitness of things to mention that in the OT period itself the term Ecclesia gradually gained other shades of meaning. 'A separate race', 'gathering for festival', 'an assembly for ordination', are a few of such examples.

### **13. Sunagogue and the Ecclesia become determined**

Another development that had its impact, both on the usage of the terms, 'Ecclesia' and the 'Sunagogue' as well as on the emergence of Ecclesia as a separate Christian concept and entity, must be noted. In the early eras, Christian community comprised mainly of converts from Judaism. On account of the racial affinity, the Jews did not prohibit these converted Christians from praying and performing rites in the sunagogues. But the Jewish rabbis began to oppose this practice, once the 'gentiles', who, in the eyes of the Jews, were of inferior stock, began to embrace Christianity. Consequently, the Christians were constrained to set up separate places of worship. The name Ecclesia was given to specify such buildings, and the worshippers assembled therein. This step, enabled the

Christians to establish their distinctive identity from the Israelites and their places of worship, which were called sunagogues.

#### **14. A synopsis of the New Testament-Ecclesial orientation**

The NT with its 27 canonical books, was compiled around the close of the 1st century A.D. It is observed that it is the 'book' that makes the Church. Almost all its books have their influence on Ecclesiology. It is true, that some of them contain more instructions and doctrinal declarations about the Church than in others. Of the synoptic gospels, St. Matthew's is called the 'ecclesial gospel', as it describes the nature, congregational aspect, the 'Immanuel' concept, the mission etc. of the Church. True, this gospel is an amplification of the one by St. Mark, which is the earliest and shortest of the four. The appeal and emphasis of St. Luke's gospel is, on the catholicity of the Church based on the universality of 'Salvation'. It is even remarked that verses 44 to 48 of Chap. 24 of this Gospel is an epitome on ecclesiology. St. John's Gospel is essentially mystical and symbolic, besides being Hellenistic in overtone. The Council Fathers of Vat II, have expressed the view, that it nevertheless enshrines the 'internal aspects' of the Church, despite its main thrust on the concept, that 'Jesus is the Way' to salvation. 'The Tradition' of the Church and the glorification of the Eucharist are clearly found in the 'Acts of the Apostles'. Further, this book discloses the nature of the Church, as a 'College or Synod'. In his epistles, St. Paul presented the Church in Her pristine paradigm and has conceptualised Her in the most exaltic and emotive imagery, the 'Body of Christ'. Writings of St. Peter, St. John, and St. James also explain the Ecclesia, Her essential forms and features. The Book of Revelation, which is almost apocalyptic in content, contains passages, prolific enough for a well developed Mariology. Chap 12 of it, is a classic example. St. Ephrem expounds the doctrine of the 'motherhood' of the Church in relation to 'Mother Mary', on this basis. For Ephrem, Mary is the 'type' of the Church. In a hymn of the Holy week, he sings, "let us call the Church itself Mary,

for it befits her to have two names." To Dionysius Bar Salibi, the Syrian Orthodox Liturgist of the 12th-13th centuries, the 'woman wrapped up in the cloth of the Sun', as described in the Book of Revelation, is the figure of the Church. These observations have been brought out by Rev. Dr. Panicker, in the book cited earlier.

### **15. 'The Tradition'**

The second source of Ecclesiology is 'The Tradition'. In fact, it complements the first one, the Bible. The term 'Tradition' is derived from the Latin word 'traditio', meaning 'giving over'. In the objective sense, it denotes the 'deposit of faith', handed over by the Apostles, to the Church. But in the operative sense, it means, the process of 'transmission by succession'. 'The Tradition' thus refers to the principle of 'faith in Christ' and the practice of its continuity. It was with the emergence of Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, who represented the Church of Gaul and the Church of Asia in the 2nd century A.D., that the notion of Tradition as a doctrine of the Church was worked out. The Apostolic experiences, handed on to generations by the Holy Spirit, through the Church, summarise 'the Tradition'. This can be explained in another manner. If the Apostles, especially Peter and Paul, are the main originators of the 'Tradition', the 'Church Fathers' are the transmitters of it. The appellation 'Church Father' is applied, to a person of antiquity, orthodoxy, sanctity and ecclesiastical approval.

### **16. Views of St. Basil of Caesarea**

St. Basil of Caesarea, who along with Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, constitute the trio, called 'Capodocean Fathers', was uncompromising in his stand for the strict observation of the Tradition, in addition to the absolute adherence to the Gospels. It was his exhortation that any attempt to reject any custom of the Church, would amount to casting of aspersion on the Gospel itself. According to the celebrated

Catholic theologian, Yves Congar, "The Tradition is an offering by which the Christian mystery is communicated to successive generations throughout the history of the world, so that the people physically separated from original 'kerygma', by space and time are incorporated into the same unique identical reality of the Father's gift of the saving truth of revelation, made in Jesus Christ."

### **17. Past, Present and Future**

The Church makes the 'Tradition' by interpreting the 'Faith' and past events. This is done in terms of the present and in reference to the future. What Rev. Sr. Dr. Prasanna Vazheeparambil CMC, remarks in her doctoral dissertation captioned, 'Making and Unmaking of Tradition' is to be adduced here. "The Apostolic period presents the Church's very first experience of revelation of God in Christ, and the first attempt to pass it on, while the Patristic period witnessed the inculturation of Tradition in different Churches". This implies, that there can be many 'traditions' in accordance with the variations of times and climes, within 'The Tradition' itself. The statement of the Indian Theological Association, held in 1983 at Nagpur is appropriate here. "The Ecclesiological concepts and traditions that provide a certain universal uniformity to the Church in the past are seen today to be socio-culturally conditioned by the times and places in which they were formed". Thus, in addition to 'The Tradition' concerning Paschal mystery, there evolved a second and secondary category of tradition. It consists of the rule of teaching, the discipline of living and the dogmas of the Church. The two categories of traditions are not of equal value. The 'Christ-Events' and their messages which form 'The Tradition' are absolute and immutable. As St. Paul writes in his Epistles to Corinthians and Galatians, they are fundamental to the Christian way of life. On the other hand, the 'secondary' traditions are open to amendments. 'Tradition', whether primary or secondary is recognized and revered by the Church, only when it does not contravene or does not go against the Holy Scripture.

By interpreting the 'Tradition' the Church becomes not only the prophet of the probable, but also the seer of the certain. One important point is to be noted here. The Antiochian, Alexandrian, Armenian, Chaldean and Constantinople Churches have zealously preserved the Biblical and symbolic traditions. This has elicited eulogy even from the Roman Church. In its decree No.17 on Ecumenism, Vat II expresses this unreservedly. "With regard to the authentic theological traditions of the Orientals, we must recognize that they are admirably rooted in the Holy Scriptures, fostered and given expression in the Liturgical life, nourished by the living traditions of the Apostles, by the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and the spiritual authors of the East. They are directed towards a right ordering of life, indeed towards a full contemplation of Christian truth.... ". So, without denying the past heritage, Christians of India can evolve an Ecclesiology and a Theology from the ethos and environments of the country.

### 18. 'Scripture' and 'the Tradition'

In nutshell, 'The Tradition' as such, is one and the same for the Church. The content of this faith is the 'Christ-Event'. The ultimate sources of this faith are Revelation channeled through the Scripture, or the Bible and the Tradition. Herein lies, the relation between the two main sources of Faith. To repeat, these two are the Scripture and 'The Tradition'. Together, they constitute the Church. At the same time, the remark of Martin Luther as quoted in Dr. J.S. Whale's 'Christian Doctrine' must also be reckoned. "There would be no Bible, and no Sacraments without the Church and the ministerium ecclesiasticum". Equally significant is the observation of the reputed modern theologian Karl Barth. In 'Church Dogmatics' he contends, "The Word of God meets us in threefold forms. Jesus, the living word, the Bible, the written word and the Church the proclaimed word. They constitute a unity. And it is only through the mediation of the written word and the proclaimed word that we have access to Christ, the revealed word. It is only

in the living context of the Church, as the community of Spirit, that Scripture comes alive".

### **19. Quiet flows the Ecclesia**

The Ecclesia has come into earthly existence out of the ineffable love of the Bl. Trinity, so that the children of Eve shall regain the communion of Paradise which Adam their forefather forfeited by his fall at the Garden of Eden, due to the 'first disobedience' as the great English poet Milton puts it in the 1st Book of 'Paradise Lost'. And, the Ecclesia or the Church continues to exist, to make every man and woman, the heir apparent to the idyllic felicity and immortal bliss, that await him or her in the 'Kingdom of God'. Yes, quietly, but, combining Peterine 'faith', Pauline 'zeal' and Johannine 'vision', does the Ecclesia flow on, irresistibly, to fulfil Her mission and ministry on the institutional, communal, sacramental, kerygmatic or evangelic and diaconal levels for spiritualising the secular life of Her members. She would flow on to the full and final glory at heavenly Jerusalem. In the words John Macquarrie, "The Church is a stage in the process that leads from creation through reconciliation to consummation. The end of this movement is the Kingdom of God, the all embracing commonwealth of love and freedom in which all humanity and indeed all creation will be renovated and transformed". Rightly used, the Ecclesia can be a mighty instrument for replenishing and renewing both the mankind and its abode, the world. This apparently is the plan of the Bl. Trinity, regarding the earthly Ecclesia or the visible Church.

## CHAPTER II

# THE TRINITARIAN DIMENSIONS OF THE CHURCH

### 1. 'Icon of the Trinity'

The Ecclesia is acclaimed, the 'Icon of the Trinity'. There are substantial reasons for this claim. 'Mystery and Communion' which are the essential elements of the 'Holy Trinity' are verily visible in the Ecclesia also. Again, the Trinitarian unity is reflected in the Church. The Ecclesia is the extension of the Divine communion to mankind. The fundamental reason why the Church is 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic' is also because it is the Icon of the Trinity. In short, Trinity is the model and ideal of the Church.

### 2. Operation of Perichoresis

The origin, formation and culmination of the Ecclesia are explained by ecclesiologists and theologians, by ascribing each of these three phenomena, to each one of the three Persons of the Bl. Trinity. Accordingly, they distinguish three distinctive epochs of 'Salvation History' and attribute each of them separately, to each of the three Persons of the Bl. Trinity. This is elegantly expressed by St. Paul as 'planning' by the Father, 'realization' through the Son, and 'completion' in the Spirit. Nonetheless, it is a single or one or holistic act of the Triune God. It is due to what is called Perichoresis, which is an inherent, subtle, substantive and operative principle of the Trinity. This envisages that, the Father is in the Son and the Spirit wholly and always, the Son is in the

Father and the Spirit wholly and eternally, Holy Spirit is present in the Father and Son wholly and ever. It is the doctrine of simultaneous unity and diversity. The word perichoresis became constantly used in Christology ever since Maximus the confessor employed it. Likewise, in theology it began to be commonly used after its usage by Gregory of Nazianzen. Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical 'Divinum illud Munus' also proclaims this truth. According to it, "the activity of the three Persons of the Bl. Trinity in the world, is one and the same, but fittingly attributed to one or the other Person, by appropriation". Trinity is a communal or relational reality. The Ecclesia has no existence without or outside this mysterious relation.

### **3. Type, Reality and Fulfilment**

To explain the Trinitarian working in the life of the Church, three stages are distinguished in the evolution of the Ecclesia. They are identified, as the 'Church of God the Father', the 'Church of Christ the Son' and the 'Church of Holy Spirit'. St. Ephrem, who is hailed the 'harp' of the Holy Ghost, names these three phases as the 'type', 'reality', and 'fulfilment'. The same may be expressed as 'Prefiguration', the 'Church' and the 'Kingdom'. Ecclesiologists sometimes style these three as the 'Pre-Existent', 'Historical' and 'Eschatological' eras or the 'Shadow', 'Earthly' and 'Fulfilment', epochs of the Church. With reference to the Bible, they may be called, the OT, Gospel and the Apostolic periods.

### **4. 'Shepherd of Hermas' - The grand vision**

In the 'pre-existent' period, the Church belongs to the celestial world. R. Kress, the theologian, calls this period, 'the theo-ontological' one. This stage can also be called the preparatory period. It is this period that is 'shadowed' in the OT of the Bible. In this stage, the Church was created before the sun, moon and the stars of the sky. Theologically speaking, this was the first creation in the mind of God. Consequently,

the Church became the foundation of the entire Universe. The 'Ecclesia' is therefore depicted as a cosmic edifice. The description in the ancient anthem, the 'Shepherd of Hermas' sings in similar vein. In this hymn, the imagery is more imaginative, impressive and even intuitive. It presents the Church in terms of an 'elderly woman'. To the query of the visionary, as to why she was so elderly, the author of the anthem answers, "because, she was created before all beings".

### 5. 'Torah, Nabim and Ketubim' - Prophesise the Ecclesia

In the 'pre-figuration' epoch as reflected in the OT, Israel is the main actor. The books of Moses, those of Prophets and the Psalms together with other writings, herald the 'shadow' of the Church. The Israelites named these texts in Hebrew 'Torah, Nabim and Ketubim' respectively. In English they are called 'The Law', 'The Prophets' and 'The Writings'. These three categories jointly constitute the OT. 'The Law' consists of the five books, collectively called the Pentateuch attributed to Moses. 'The Prophets' is the collective name for the books supposedly written by, the 'major, minor' and the twelve 'lesser' prophets. The 'major' and 'minor' prophets are sometimes referred to as the 'former' and 'later'. The remaining books of the OT are named 'The Writings'. The main episodes of this period are, the election of Patriarch Abraham, liberation from the thralldom of the Pharaohs of Egypt by prophet Moses, the promulgation of the 'Ten Commandments' at Mt. Sinai, occupation of the 'Promised Land', the establishment of the Tabernacle etc. Besides, there were special manifestations through certain numbers, symbols, theophanies and ecclesial events like the building of the Tabernacle. 'Kyros' or the 'Lord' or 'Yahweh', or in Trinitarian terminology, 'God the Father', was the dominating figure; of course, not to the exclusion of the other two Persons of the Trinity, on account of the operation of the principle of perichoresis. All the happenings of this period, were however, orienting to the 'Christ- Event', the crest jewel of which was the transition of the celestial Ecclesia to the terrestrial level.

## 6. Heavenly Manna and the Earthly Ecclesia

As Yahweh dropped manna from the high heaven to sustain His 'chosen children', the Israel, the Trinitarian Father, sent His only begotten Son to establish the Ecclesia on earth. The grand purpose of it is to redeem, not only the 'chosen' but all His children, namely, 'mankind'. This is the celebrated 'Christ-Event'. With it starts the second epoch or the 'Earthly' Ecclesia. This is the 'historical' period of the Church. Thus, the Ecclesia becomes a temporal reality also, besides being a heavenly one. The invisible Ecclesia of heaven became the visible Church on earth. The Church is now represented as the 'New Eve', the 'Mother' of all living beings. Christ is both the mediator for, and director of, this 'New Eve', without impairing the 'Trinitarian Communion'. Legitimately therefore, it is christened the 'Christ-centered economy' or dispensation. For, if the Father is the 'theo-ontological' origin of the Church, the 'Word Incarnate' or Christ is the theo-historical cause of it. The Church would not have come into Her earthly existence but for the 'Christ-Events', like the calling of Peter, the other Apostles and the establishing of the Holy Eucharist. At this juncture, it is to be emphasised that the Eucharist ensures the perpetual presence of Christ in the Church and through Her, among humanity, till eternity. Thus the prophetic utterance 'He shall be called Immanuel', meaning 'God with us', is being realised by all the members of the Church. What St. Thomas A' Kempis writes in the devotional manual 'Of the Imitation of Christ' is quite exhilarating. "In this Sacrament Spiritual grace is conferred and the strength which was lost is restored in the soul and the beauty which, by sin had been disfigured, again returneth". Pay heed to what Henri de Lubac, S.J, comments in the 'Splendour of the Church'. "Our unity is the fruit of Calvary and results from the Mass's application". If Christ had not established and sanctified the Eucharist, His death would have been only a casual historical event and not a religious episode

evoking adoration and veneration. In all probability, it would have been pushed into oblivion, as man's memory is proverbially short. Or at the most, it would have intensified the interest of a few scholars. Conversely, if Jesus had not subjected Himself to death at Calvary, the 'words of institution' at the passover ceremony, would have been a parade of vainglorious verbiage. But, according to the Divine plan, Jesus testified to the validity of His words, by the quality of His deeds. He offered His life for humanity. Truly, in theological terms, all these events are the holistic actions of the Bl. Trinity. This is what is extolled in the 'Breviarium', edited by Bedjan: "whose foundation, Father had laid, the Son has completed". The Ecclesia is the blossoming on earth of the Divine dispensation. "The Church" as, the Catholic theologian Louis Bouyer says in the treatise 'Life and Liturgy' "is the actualisation of the people which He had been preparing in the course of history from the first man to the holy and just one Himself". Or as Rev. Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose remarks in her doctoral thesis, "the Church is a gradual manifestation of a continuous reality, existentially rooted in the Divine plan of God, to form a people for His own sake". This is undeniably the unbroken thread that runs through the 'Salvation History'. It is significant that even the liberation theologian, Gutierrez extols the Eucharistic celebration in his book 'A theology of Liberation'. "The first task of the Church is to celebrate with joy the gift of the salvific action of God in humanity, accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the Eucharist memorial and thanksgiving".

## **7. St. Peter, the primus inter-pares**

The Church or Ecclesia was founded on the twelve Apostles with St. Peter as the primus inter-pares or the first among equals. Certainly, Christ Himself was, is and will be, the corner stone of the Church. It is suggested by St. Ephrem, that the very number twelve at which Jesus

fixed the number of the members of the Apostolic College, is an indication of and link with the twelve tribes of Old Israel. Similarly the twelve springs which Moses found at Elim, and the twelve stones that Joshua picked up from river Jordan, prefigure the twelve Apostles. Critical analysis of Peter's personality would lead one to the conclusion, that his faith was solid as the rock itself. We have the words of Jesus Himself for it. It was Christ Himself who honoured Simon by the title Kepa or Peter, meaning 'the rock'. But it was not an honorific one. Rather, it carried with it an enormous amount of responsibility to discharge a function. Jesus Himself was well aware of it. Hence, in the Gospel of Luke, we see Christ assuring Peter: "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren". The injunction to 'strengthen your brethren' speaks of the special role that Peter had to play in converting other disciples, if they displayed any lapse. According to R. Murray, "Christ, the Chief Shepherd made Simon the chief shepherd in His place". According to Aphrahat of the 4th century, "when Simon was called 'kepa' by Christ, the character of Christ which is symbolised by the image of rock was shared by Simon". Very justifiably, Jesus appreciated this flawless faith of Peter, and made it the firm foundation of His future citadel, the Church. Also, as Jesus is Divinity Incarnate, He is righteousness itself and His judgements must be always upright. It does not behove men of frail faculties to pass casual comments or pejorative remarks on the Divine commandment on Peter's primacy. The successors of St. Peter's thrones anywhere can legitimately and exclusively claim primacy. There cannot be any devil's advocacy against their authority. At Pentecost, it was Peter, who filled with the Spirit of the risen Christ, set the pattern for Christ's Church by his speech. This contains the seeds of Soteriology and Christology. Moreover, it was at Peter's behest that a new apostle was elected in place of the traitor Judas. Again, "the only one of the circle of twelve, whose missionary activity we can be certain of beyond doubt, is

Peter" says Hans Kung in the book, 'The Church'. Furthermore, 'tending of sheep' was directly entrusted with Simon Peter. The liturgical prayer further supplicates: "Remember, O, our Lord, your promise to Peter and to your Church, that the gates of sheol and its despots shall not conquer her". The comments of Dionysius Barsalibi, Bishop of Amida and Gregorius Bar Hebraeus, the 13th century Catholicos of the East Syrian Orthodox Church, as incorporated in Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Panicker's book also assert the primacy of Peter. Barsalibi writes: "It is then through Simon that Christ invested every true priest with the power of loosing and binding. These two promises, which none but God could ever have made, were made to Simon alone and to us, but through him, by our blessed Lord". The observation of Bar Hebraeus, is more emphatic and expressive. "The Disciples seem to have forgotten what had been said to Peter, viz, "Thou art a rock, upon thee I will build My Church, and to thee, I will give the keys of heaven" One wishes that churches craving for 'autocephalacy', had heeded to this comment of the versatile genius Bar Hebraeus! Christ commissioned the Apostles to be the 'fishers of men' in the four quarters of the world. Two greater events were yet to follow for the hallowing of the Church; the Resurrection and the Pentecost. Jointly, they undid the damage of the diaspora, that took place after the fiasco at Babel and the dispersion after crucifixion. The way was paved for a convocation or congregation of men. The seal was thus set on the community of the redeemed. The 'Ecclesia' was formed as a communion of worshippers, with Peter as the Chief. This was certainly a corporate body. The Church became a unique 'Sacrament', by the supreme self-sacrifice of Christ. All the events of OT epoch thus ended well. In the appreciative words of St. Ireaneus, 'the OT patriarchs and the prophets receive their perfect form in us, that is, in the Church and receive the renewal for their labour'. Yes, the Divine mystery was revealed. In jubilation, Christ is hailed "Oh Lord!, You founded on earth, the Holy Church, according to the 'type' of that high, which is in heaven".

## 8. Cenacle or 'Upper room' experience

The last and the third phase of the manifestation of the economy or the 'becoming' of the Church on the earth is attributed to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sometimes designated the 'Unitive Being'. It is because, one of the main functions of the Holy Spirit is to sustain and strengthen through the Ecclesia, the unity of the Creator and the created. The Church becomes a visible community or reality only after the Paraclete descended upon and sanctified Her. To be more explicit, following the exhilarating experience of the Apostles at the upper room in the mansion of Mark, the Church enters on Her 'theo-societal' course. Since then, the Spirit became the constituting principle of the Church. In ecclesiological expression, the Church gains the 'Pneumatological dimension', by the Pentecost episode. On the day of Pentecost St. Peter proclaimed to the people the message of salvation in Christ. This is considered to be the first sermon by any prelate of the Ecclesia. The 'Acts' mention: "When they heard this, their consciences were stung". The Syriac term 'Ruha' for the Spirit, elucidates the purport of pneumatology. The term 'Ruha' signifies the spiritual motherhood or maternal love and the medicine for the soul. Surely, these are the wherewithals needed by the Church to caress Her children in their sojourn here and journey towards the heavenly home. After the cenacle experience, the Apostles became the co-parsons and collegiate custodians of the Church, the mystical body of Christ. Assuredly this was without prejudice to the primacy of Peter. The Church was reassured further by Paraclete in Her errand of evangelisation. The Holy Spirit, enlightened, instructed and perfected the Apostles, to propagate peace in the four quarters of the earth. Daringly they did sow peace in the world. As a result 'the peace that surpasseth all understanding' came to dwell in the hearts of the penitent and the contrite. In the liturgical prayer it is proclaimed, "The Spirit the Paraclete, radiated on the world and because of this, the whole world was suffused with grace". It can thus be commented that

evangelization has in it, more of a qualitative tenor than a quantitative one. Hence the 'Mother Church' upholds the doctrine, that salvation is easier within the Church than without and outside of Her. The Church and Her children are ambassadors of Christ, for witnessing the 'good news', of what God had done for man through Christ. This mission of the Church will be completed in the 'fulfilment' or eschata.

### **9. The 'Kindly Light' that leads**

The earthly Ecclesia that we have now, subsists in the 'Church' which is the Sacrament of the 'Kingdom of God'. This is the third stage. This will be realised only at the end of Time or in the eschatological future. It is the mission of the present earthly Church to transcend the spatio-temporal limits and become one with the 'Kingdom of God'. This is what is termed the soteriological or salvation mission of the 'Mother Church'. She performs Her functions of preaching, teaching, guiding, governing and sanctifying, through praying to the Paraclete Who is perpetually present in the Church and overseeing Her. The Eastern Fathers of the past were well aware of this. No wonder, they named the 'Ecclesia', the 'Church of the Holy Ghost'. Borrowing a line from Cardinal Newman's hymn, it may be said that the Spirit leads the Ecclesia like the 'kindly light amidst the encircling gloom'. By virtue of the authority received through 'apostolic succession' the duly ordained clergy invokes the Paraclete through epiclesis, to sanctify the Eucharistic elements, other sacraments, sacramentals etc. Further it is the Holy Spirit that fulfils everything of the Church, by the Church and for the Church, any time and at all times. Moreover it is the Paraclete that escorts us to the 'Eschata' or the 'Kingdom of God' which is the be all and end all of the Divine dispensation.

### **10. Like a word and its meaning**

The Church which was demonstrated by the Father and instituted by the Son was co-constituted by the Spirit. Along with God's 'unfolding of

the salvation history', the Ecclesia is formulated, fore-shadowed and finally formed. It is said therefore that while the Bl. Trinity is the source, Ecclesia is the Divine means for man's salvation. The Church is immanent in the Salvific Scheme of the Triune God. To use an imagery, like a word and its meaning, they remain inseparable, ever and for ever. So to use another simile, Bl. Trinity is the root and the Holy Church its fruit. In short, the Church is born in Trinity, lives in Trinity and culminates in Trinity. To put it in theological terms, the Church is of God, of Christ, of the Spirit. A caveat or caution. The Earthly Ecclesia when founded, was not a pure spiritual society, as implying that all outward rites were absent or that leadership in Her was not an 'office' but a matter of occasional inspiration. No judgement can be farther off the mark. The Church is an 'ecclesia mixta', a mixed assembly of saints and sinners. This was the formulation of the Fathers. It implies that the members are characterised by saintly and sinful features. 'All of us are sinners' as Augustine mentions with reference to Romans 3:23 and 5:18. Yet all of us can tread on the wings of the cherubim. This is our birth right, the Ecclesia emphasises. That is why the Ecclesia is predicated 'Holy'.

### 11. 'Mysterion' and 'Oikonomia' - St. Paul

The Church is a wonderful and sacred mystery because God the Father loves Her, Christ the Son purchased Her and the Holy Ghost hallows Her. The Ecclesia, both in heaven and on earth, is the manifestation of what may be called the Providence. In its working, St. Paul distinguishes two aspects, and refers to them in Greek the 'mysterion' and the 'oikonomia'. In English, they mean 'mystery and economy'. However, St. Paul puts forward three explanations for them. Firstly, as the 'Will of God', then as the 'Incarnate Word', and finally, as the 'Proclamation of the Gospel' by the Paraclete. But it must be remembered that the three form a single wholistic action due to the inherent perfect communion in the Holy Trinity.

## 12. Paradoxes too illustrate the mystery of the Ecclesia

The paradoxical phrases and the 'predication by opposites' used to highlight the different aspects and characteristics of the Church, also illustrate the mystery involved. Epithets like 'Mother and Virgin' 'Holy and Sinful' 'Old and Young' 'Already and not yet' confirm the mysterious nature of the Ecclesia. Except by paradoxes, the 'mystery' cannot be explained.

## 13. Dawn of Creation and the Morn of Parousia

The 'Mystery', that is the Church, is effected through a long process of God's benevolence. The starting point of which is revelation and the finale salvation. Obviously, the span of this marvellous scheme is from Creation to Parousia. So it may be affirmed, that the dawn of Parousia would read what in the morn of Creation wrote. This saving scheme is set, along a linear path. It is enacted by many an actor in the spatio-temporal stage of this very world, through certain events and occurrences. These episodes are collectively called 'Salvation History'. In theological and ecclesiological explanation, this takes place due to the Will of God. That is why, 'Yahweh', the God of the Old Israel and the Truine God of Christians, the New Israel, are each termed 'theos of history'. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the linear concept of history is a legacy of the Judeo-Christian thinking. But it should be noted that it has an eschatological and transcendental dimension. Similarly, the idea of an 'intervening' or 'active God of History' also is a contribution of the Jewish-Christian theology. Christian doctrine holds, that unless the Eternal is somehow given to man in history which he can understand, God will remain forever the unknown God. If there is no 'junction' between God's heavenly life and man's mundane one, man would be without God and without hope in this world. In utter despair, man would then utter the cry 'God! thou may be in high heaven, but we are upon the earth below. Between us there is a wide and deep ditch'. No! Christianity would not suffer this

groaning and moaning. It affirms the absolute significance of a particular historical process for salvation and of a particular historic person who is its climax, its last word for the bridging of the ditch. In the Christian view, History is Salvation History. It is a regular reduction to one man, namely Christ and a progressive expansion to mankind. In the facts of history lies Jesus, who is the heart and soul of history. The history of Jesus and the story of Christ- events can be rightly understood and bequeathed only by appreciating the legacies of Judaism. They are monotheism, eschatology and messianism. Jewish monotheism was rooted in the age-old experience of God and not in any speculation on the metaphysical Absolute. Eschatology insists that history and time have a real meaning and lead up to a divine design. Messianism implies that God is no mere spectator on human history, like a god of Mount Olympus but the decisive participant in it. This view is in sharp contrast to the conception of a 'sleeping God' or God as a 'wound-up spring', entertained by certain other philosophies and religions. The actors of this historic 'enactment' were initially humanity itself, and subsequently the 'chosen people' with their patriarchs and prophets. The hero, however, was Jesus with his Apostles. Despite many episodes orienting towards the 'Christ-Event' have taken place and the 'Ecclesia' has been established 'already' on earth, the 'Kingdom of God' which is the final destination of the 'Salvific Plan' has 'not yet' been actualised. It would happen at the eschata or parousia, when Jesus would come in all glory to lead His Bride, the Church, to the Bridal-Chamber.

#### **14. The OT anticipates Christ, the NT articulates Him**

According to St. Paul, 'Economy' denotes the Divine dispensation, especially of grace or mercy. Ancient Syriac Fathers used the terms 'Raza' and 'Medabranutha' meaning mystery and economy respectively, to signify these aspects. 'Economy' in essence is revelation, leading to the realization of the 'mystery'. The first revelation, albeit incomprehensible, was the 'creation' itself. This was followed by others like the Covenant at

Mt. Senai, the Exodus from Egypt, Prophecies, the Babylonian exile etc. The ultimate end is technically termed, 'Salvation'. It is an inscrutable wisdom of the Lord, that He reveals Himself, through phases or by bits. There may be differences in the degrees of these manifestations. This can clearly be seen on comparing the OT and NT episodes. However, this does not mean, that the 'Mother Church' accords any superiority or inferiority for either of these books. Rather, as St. Augustine rightly points out, 'The Church is a nursing 'Mother' whose two breasts are the Old and New Testaments'. This sends a note of warning. Separate the two, the one becomes a cripple and the other a corpse. Both are complementary and not contradictory to each other. The OT always anticipates Christ. The NT abundantly articulates Him. The witness of the OT to Christ is hardly less clear than that of the NT. The Scriptures of the Jewish community were the swaddling cloths in which Christ was laid.

### **15. An assurance and an acquittance**

The two co-ordinates or points of reference of the 'Salvation History' are 'revelation and salvation'. The former is an assurance and the latter an acquittance, of God's promise. In Pauline parlance, 'Salvation' too is a mystery like revelation'. It is to be hailed as the bountiful benevolence of the Bl. Trinity. That is why Christianity holds that life which is an on-going story, 'has its running theme', the mystery of grace, which does not reach the vanishing point.

### **16. 'Koinonia' and the Cross**

The ultimate aim of this 'Salvific Scheme' is to 'unite all' in Jesus Christ. In other words to lead all, from the first man Adam to the last. This idea is exquisitely expressed by St. Augustine in his celebrated critique, 'The City of God'. This appellation 'City of God' is applicable to the Church, as adjudged by the logic of his arguments found in this masterly

work. "This heavenly City then.... calls citizens, out of all nations and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages.... It even preserves and adopts these diversities, so long as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme God is thereby introduced". Prophetic words indeed! Centuries later, Rome picked up these enthusing expressions of the great hierarch of Hippo. The Vatican document, L.G2 lucidly states that the Ecclesia is to unite all "From Abel, the just one to the last, in the Kingdom of the Triune God, Who is ever in Communion within Himself". While St.Paul called this communion by the Greek word 'Koinonia', the Syrian scholars and savants styled it 'Shawtaputha'. For St. Paul, it is a plan to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. A sequel of this theological interpretation of this Biblical passage was the re-discovery of the ancient Syrian concept of the Church as a communion, more than as an institution. This, in fact, is a remarkable revolution brought about by the Second Vat. Council. It is a 'Communion' when and where all will be gathered both horizontally and vertically. That is, it is a union of each with all and all with each and further, each and all together, with the Almighty. This idea seems to have had its impact on the minds of the ancient Fathers, when they selected the Cross, as the major symbol of the Church. The Cross, with its vertical and the intersecting horizontal arms, is the best contrivance to convey the above mentioned dual phased 'communion'. The Cross of Jesus wiped off all the hostilities among the humans. Jesus Christ, through His 'Supreme Sacrifice' at the Cross, gathered together the 'scattered sheep' and made them into one flock. Thereby sinners became partakers along with saints in the household of the Lord. On the Cross, man makes a tryst with his maker. The Cross epitomises the whole theology of Incarnation and the redemptive act of Christ. These events are what that are remembered when one makes the sign of the Cross. From the 'wooden' Cross came the 'way' or 'salvation'

for humanity, and joy for the world, Christianity categorically contends. Conversely, on the Cross, the Creator condescended to form a fellowship with the created in perfect camaraderie. This is the true 'communion' which the Ecclesia remembers and celebrates through the Eucharist and other Sacraments. About the exhilarating effect of Communion, L.G.2 is eloquently explicit. It runs as follows: "Communion is, gathering all those who would believe in Christ, unto the Father, through the Spirit". When the Church is qualified or predicated the 'One and Catholic', it is this idea of 'communion' that is conveyed. Adam had this experience of communion with the Creator, as a right or prerogative, inherent by virtue of his sonship. But this was subdued by the 'shame of sinfulness' that befell him, as he became a privy to the perfidious counsel of satan, the prince of the world. Paradise was lost. Still, God in His unfathomable wisdom, limitless love and immeasurable mercy sent his only begotten Son to this world, to regain the Paradise for all men of all climes and times. For this, the 'societas' called the Church was established on earth as an everlasting abode of His presence. True to the Divine mandate, the 'Mother Church', fondles us, fosters us, feeds us, fences us and fends us.

### **17. Liturgy, the 'Locus of Faith'**

Liturgy is the response of the worshipping community to God's revelation. Or it is people's participation in the action of Christ. In Liturgy the outgoing of man to God, is called the vertical movement. The word 'Liturgy' is derived from the Greek word 'Leiturgia', which is formed by the combination of the following two words, 'Leitos' meaning public or social and 'urgia', signifying work. Etymologically therefore it means public or social work. The ancient Greeks used the term 'Liturgy' in this profane or secular sense. In the LXX, 'Leiturgia' is referred to public worship performed by duly ordained priests in the proper manner. From Rom 15:16, and Phil 2:17, the spiritual meaning of the term can be drawn. The

'Christian' connotation of the word is vividly expressed in Acts 13:2. To have fuller appreciation of this passage it is however essential that the notion of 'Sacred or Liturgical' time and the 'Secular or Historical' time must be fully understood. 'Secular Time' deals with the sequence of events. 'Sacred Time' deals not with the succession of happenings. So in 'Sacred Time', there is no past, present and future. 'Sacred Time' is concerned only with the 'quality' of salvific action and not with when or where it happened. It is a Liturgical mystery that 'time' gets transformed into 'events'. Consequently any salvific event can be recaptured at any point in historical time. That is why theologians opine that in Liturgy there is the 'conjunction' of 'Secular and Sacred Times'. Liturgy has been emotively explained as 'a love-meeting' between Christ, the Bridegroom and His Bride the Church. The Encyclical, 'Mediator Dei' of Pope Pius XII, explains Christian Liturgy in lucid style. "The Sacred Liturgy is the public worship which our redeemer, as the Head of the Church, renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father. In short, it is the public worship rendered by the mystical body of Christ in entirety of its head and members". Jesus is the centre of the Liturgy. The term 'public worship' emphasises that Liturgy is celebrated by the worshipping community as a corporate body or society. So the relation of each individual with the others of the community is highlighted. Liturgy implies a communal life which is solidly organised, to which the individual must adapt himself without demurring and differing. This is explained as the horizontal aspect of Liturgy. Thus it becomes clear that 'private liturgy' is a contradiction in terms. The practice of the early Christians was that the people by themselves took part in the Liturgy alongside the clergy. Prayer, including the celebration at the altar was performed in such a way that the people were 'ingrafted' into it. That is to say that prayer was co-executed by the people. The Church, as a community or corporate body of worshippers is held together and sanctified

by the Liturgy. So it is said that the Liturgy is the source from which the life of the Ecclesia flows and the summit to which that life is directed. Considering this unique aspect, some scholars suggest that the Liturgy is the central nervous system of Ecclesiology. The 'Christ-event' and 'The Tradition' are articulated through the Liturgy. Yet, Liturgy is something more. It is the remembrance also of the 'Salvation History' as revealed through the OT and the NT. Further it is an assertion of the continued operation of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Thus Liturgy is both a description and a prescription. No wonder, Liturgy is the 'locus of faith' of the worshippers.

### 18. Evolution of Liturgy

Liturgy is not a make; it is a growth. It evolved in the mould of the collective devotion of the community during ages. In the sense of a grand and solemn service to the Lord, Liturgy existed during the days of Christ in the Jewish temples of Jerusalem. Jesus did not oppose this cult of the OT. Indeed, He Himself went to the temple for great festivals. In the backdrop of all this, it is not idle talk that Christianity from its very inception was endowed with a very rich liturgical life. This is the conclusion from the study of the last one hundred years on the sources of primitive liturgy. Scholars have identified the following important sources. 'The first Apology of Justin the Martyr' written around 150 AD; 'the Apostolic Constitution' of the 2nd century; 'Mystagogic Catecheses', authored in 347AD by St. Cyril of Jerusalem; 'De Sacramentis', by St. Ambrose written around 390 AD; 'the Didache' or the teachings of the twelve disciples, brought out at sometime in the 2nd century; 'Apostolic Tradition' written by Hippolytus of Rome in 215 AD; 'The Euchalion of Serapion', authored around 360 AD; 'Peregrinato Aetheriae' by a nun named Atheria, describing her pilgrimage to the Holyland; 'the Catechesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia' produced around 425 AD. Only three languages were employed in the production of primitive Liturgies. They were Syro-Aramaic,

Greek and Latin, as they were supposed to be 'holy', since they were the languages in which the inscriptions on the Cross over the head of Christ were written. By the 3rd and 4th centuries, however, six main branches of Liturgy were developed by the Christians, drawing inspiration from the tradition of the primitive Jerusalem Community and the Liturgy of St. James, the brother of Jesus Christ. They are, the Syrian, Chaldean, Latin, Armenian, Alexandrian and Byzantine Liturgies. The central theme of all these families is the mystery of Salvation. The understanding of the mystery is definitely different. As a consequence varied formulations of prayers and divergent ways of celebrations are found in them. Yet another point to be borne in mind is that exact rubrics were not prescribed for each word and rite of the Liturgy in the early eras. Much freedom was allowed till the codification by the Fathers during the 3rd and 4th centuries. When the role of Liturgy in the lives of Christians is considered it must be admitted that Liturgy has much greater importance and impact in the 'Christian life' and ethos of the Greek-East and the Syriac-Orient than in those of the Latin-West. In other words, the primacy of the Liturgy as the summit of 'Christian life' is very profound in the 'greater and lesser' Eastern Churches. It was a prevalent practice among Syrian Fathers to devote their spare time to bring out Liturgies and their exegeses. In fact the number of Liturgies authored was even a criterion of the scholarship and saintliness of a 'Christian Father'. Anyway, it is quite a marvel that both the Syrian and Greek prelates separately produced, more than one hundred Liturgies during this early period. According to the Greek Orthodox theologian, Nikos Nissiotis the realities expressed by the terms 'Church, Tradition and Liturgy' can even be identified in the Eastern tradition.

### **19. 'Lex Orandi Lex Credendi'**

In 1894, in his Encyclical 'Praeclara Gratulationis', Pope Leo XIII, made the observation "..... in defence of the Catholic Faith, we often have recourse to arguments and testimonies borrowed from the teaching,

the rites and customs of the East". The observation of Rev. Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose may be reproduced here. "Thus the history of the theological world witnessed an exodus of the Western theologians who sought the pure Christian faith and the articulation of it in theology from the Latin Roman world to the Greek-East and from the Greek-East to the Syriac Orient, in order to liberate theology from the bondage of categories". Likewise, what a western theologian Mikloshazy has written in his treatise 'East Syrian Eucharist' would encourage studies in the Syriac Liturgy. He overwhelmingly outpours, "The Oriental Liturgy is a gold mine; we must stand in wonder before the richness of their prayerful, reverential, often deeply penetrating insights, that our rationalistic mind is not able to discover". The observation of the Catholic Theologian Bede Griffiths is also worth citing "The Syrian Christianity remains as the finest expression of a Christian cultural tradition, which is neither Latin nor Greek but belongs to the ancient semitic world of Middle-East." For the Oriental Churches Liturgy is the 'elan vital', the vital energy of the Church. Vat II very validly imbibed this spirit of the East. The result is a salutary one. The rubrical approach to Liturgy has given place to a liturgical one. This has halted the 'crises' in Liturgy or the 'divorce' from the original springs and sources. Now, Liturgy is lauded and treated, the 'locus of faith and worship'. The elevating encounters of the apostles, martyrs, monks and mystics with the Lord, are all brought to the corpus of worshippers through the Liturgy of the Church. It implies that there is no secret liturgy. No doubt, Liturgy becomes the source of the belief of the community. This is what is expressed in the Latin maxim, 'Lex Orandi Lex Credendi', meaning, 'law of worship is law of belief'. Corporate worship, in its grade and kind, is the response of the community to the Eternal. It emerges as a stylized religious emotion. The observation of the American Protestant professor of Liturgy, Paul Whitman Hoon in his book 'The Integrity of Worship' is very valid. 'Forms which at first sight seem to offend by their archaism, often possess prototypical power to engage man's deepest nature, which familiar forms

do not'. It is to be admitted in all humility that Liturgy is an honest 'attempt' on the part of the mortal to offer adoration to Him who created everything and all according to His will. It is only an 'attempt' because, as Aidan Nocholas opines in 'Looking at the Liturgy', quoting Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 'No liturgy designed by men could be worthy of the subject of their homage of God at whose throne the heavenly choirs prostrate themselves.....' The Christian Calendar of the Syriac tradition is a commentary on the Liturgy. In fact it is a means by which we relive for ourselves all the events of 'Salvation History'. The liturgical practices that are to be followed daily and seasonally, are all so beautifully dove-tailed in the Syrian Christian Calendar that it is a memo and guide for spiritual life. The liturgical year is the life of Christ lived out again in 'liturgical time', in the time and in the memory of His Church. In the course of the year, all the Christ-events are relived. Christianity, certainly, is no blind belief. It is based on the beatific experience generated and geared up by Grace flowing from God Almighty, the perennial source of mercy. Christian doctrine is the historic testimony to the fact that God speaks and man hears, within the orbit of the Church founded by Christ, formulated by the Scripture cum 'The Tradition', and preserved by Paraclete.

## **20. Christian existence is corporate - Not a bouquet of believers**

The Church and the Christian existence are essentially corporate. As the Greek Orthodox theologian, George Florovsky rightly points out, in his work 'Worship and Every day life - An Eastern Orthodox view': "To be a Christian means to be in the community in Church". The congregational aspect of Christianity is rooted in the promise of Christ, that He would be present when two or three persons assemble in His name. Even a cursory glance over the prayer that He taught the disciples will convince one that in structure, style and substance, it is a corporate prayer. The philosophy of Christian community has been poetically put by St. Cyprian. "As many grains collected and ground and mixed together,

into the one mass, make one bread, so in Christ who is the heavenly bread, we may know that there is one body, with which each member is joined and united". Corporate comes from the Latin word 'Corpus' meaning 'body' or the uniting of many members into one. As a body is not made by collecting a hand here and an arm there and a pair of legs elsewhere, the corporate Ecclesia is not formed by the consent of a group of individuals to unite together. The whole is much more than the sum of its parts. The Church is not a bouquet of believers. The Ecclesia is corporate and organic, from whom each member draws his or her life. The triumphant victory of Christ over death is a victory for all mankind. The Pentecost marvel was a group experience. Even if faith may be personal, individual's life is theologically corporate. No man is an island. Surely, this is the forte and forte of the Christian doctrine, as has been handed out by the Church down through the centuries. With this firm faith as the insignia, the Ecclesia will ever remain reinforced in this ruined and ruinous realm of realities.

## CHAPTER III

# THE ESSENTIAL MARKS OF THE CHURCH

### 1. 'One is in all and all is in one'

"We believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church", so runs an article of Faith of the Episcopal Churches. The very being of the earthly Ecclesia is expressed in these four 'essential' marks enshrined in this Credal confession. They are sometimes called 'esse' as they are the essentials for the visible Church 'to be' or 'to exist'. Ontologically the earthly Ecclesia is nothing more or less than these four 'notae' or marks. None of these 'notae' can exist to the exclusion of the others. Whenever any one of them is expressed or expounded, ipso facto it implies the other three also. In other words, one is in all and all is in one, at one and the same time. It is due to the inherent 'mystery and communion' of the Ecclesia, that She is all these simultaneously. One God the Father, One Christ, One Spirit, One Eucharist and One Faith, as St. Paul pithily proclaims through his epistles, are what that makes the Church 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic'.

### 2. Creed Formation - Early period

As the four 'notae' form part of the Creed of the Church, their implication and significance can be appreciated absolutely, only with reference to the evolution, purport and purpose of the 'Creed' itself. Creed making is as old as the Christian Community, although official creeds did not appear until the 4th century, A.D. In fact, creed formulation is a legacy

of Judaism. For, the OT books Deuteronomy and I Kings, do contain the declaratory affirmation of the Jewish Faith. Primitive Church was faced by a vigorous and dangerous Jewish counter missionary campaign. In the words of antiquarian Rufinus, the situation resembled a 'cold war'. In order to distinguish friends from foes, pass-words were to be coined. The Apostles composed their Creed to serve as a recognition. But this is not what that has come to be called the 'Apostles' Creed. The origin of the so called 'Apostles' Creed is from a 'Roman Creed', developed around 2nd century A.D. St. Paul developed a proto-credal summary as seen in 1 Cor 8, and 1 Tim 2. In Mt 28 and 2 Cor 13, the beginning of the Trinitarian pattern of later conciliar creeds is found. From the opening address in 1 Peter, the baptismal formula can be gleaned. Originally, Creeds were interrogatory. Later on, they developed into declaratory ones. Early Church Fathers continued the process of Creed making. The second century writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch contain precise principles of the Christian Faith. A creed-like section is seen in the confession of Justin the Martyr, at his martyrdom, which took place around 165 A.D. Hippolytus, who was in all probability a Syrian priest of the early 3rd century did preserve the formula of Faith of the presbyters who condemned the heretic Noetus, at Smyrna, in A.D. 180. The 'Rule of Faith' which was in popular use among the Christian Community in the 2nd century gives a gist of the Faith of the then Christians. It is a short compendium of faith arranged in the Trinitarian pattern. Irenaeus, Tertullian and Eusebius had also developed Credal Formulae.

### **B. Council at Nicaea - 'Iota conflict'**

The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea held in A.D. 325, and attended by 318 Fathers, was a turning point in credal development. Although accredited ecumenical, all the Fathers save one were Easterners. And that one was Hosius of Spain, the advisor of Emperor Constantine who had convened the council on political reasons rather than on theological grounds. To combat the contentions of Arius, the Council promulgated a

credal formula of one hundred and one Greek words of which 84 deal with the Son. One of the masterminds of this credal formation was Athanasius. Interestingly he was not a member of the Council, as he was not a bishop then. The philosophical temperament and analytical acumen of young Athanasius prompted him to refute Arianism. Athanasius was quick to realise that the assertion regarding the relation between God the Father and Son, as expounded by Arius in the Greek word 'homoiousia' was full of fallacies. For, this term means that the Father and the Son are, of 'similar' or 'like' substance and the Son is a generate or a 'created' one. So the deduction would be, 'there was, when the Son was not'. Athanasius in his 'orthodoxy', denounced this as heresy as it would lead to polytheism. Therefore, he suggested another Greek word, 'homoousia' meaning, 'of the identical or same substance', to explain the relation between the Father and the Son. He affirmed that the Son is not 'created'; but 'begotten of and equal to', the Father and that 'there was not, when the Son was not'. Arius had drawn a line demarcating the Creator and the created. It is true, that he then gave Jesus, a unique place in the Universe. Yet, he put Christ on the 'created' side of the line. With dexterity Athanasius also drew such a line with equal sharpness. But he posited Jesus on the 'Creator' side. Since the two Greek words, 'homoiousia' and 'homoousia' differ only by the middle letter 'i', called 'iota' in the Greek alphabet, the Nicaean controversy is wittingly referred to as the 'iota' conflict. But the fact remains, that but for the so called crisis and the theological triumph of Athanasius, Trinitarian Christianity would have dwindled into insignificance, if not vanished completely. The situation, which impelled St. Jerome to remark, "the whole world have groaned and marvelled to find itself Arian" would have repeated almost in the entire Christendom. After prolonged polemics and acute argumentation, the Council amplified the Trinitarian formula, adumbrated by the prophets of the OT and the preachers of the NT periods.

### **Post-Nicaea period**

The 'Nicaean' third article that dealt with the Holy Ghost was supplemented by the 'Council of 150 Fathers', which is also called the 'Council of Constantinople'. It was held in A.D. 381. What evolved from the consensus of the Constantinople Council has come to be called the 'Nicaean Creed'. It is because the content of this creed is from the theology of the Nicaean Council while the contour of it, was of course of Constantinople. For precision sake, it is better to refer it as 'Nicaean - Constantinople' Creed. The Council of Chalcedon of 451 A.D., expanded further the Nicaean third article and furnished a fuller statement of the 'Creed of Nicaea'. In the East, excepting the so-called 'Jacobites' and a few other monophysites, others accepted the Chalcedon formula and introduced it into their Liturgy of the Church. The Western Church, however, retained the old 'Roman Creed' and enlarged it. This has come to be known as the 'Apostles' Creed'. The 'Apostles' Creed, the Nicaean Creed and the Constantinople Creed are jointly called the three ecumenical creeds. Centuries had to elapse before the West modified the Nicaean Creed as to incorporate into it, the word 'Holy' from their 'Apostles' Creed and finally approved and included it in the central act of worship as the Easterners were doing. It was canonized by the 3rd Council of Toledo held in 589 A.D., which enacted that the Creed of 150 Fathers' called the Nicaean-Constantinople Creed should be sung by the congregation. Since then, this creed, shortly called the Nicaean Creed, has become the ecumenical confession of faith and the official creed of the 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic' Church.

### **'I believe'**

The word 'Creed' comes from the Latin word 'credo' meaning 'I believe'. Creeds are called so, precisely because the beginning is with the word 'credo'. The substance of the creed is called the Faith. 'Creed' expounds the Faith of the Church in such a way that the meanings and bearings of Faith can be better understood. However as Pope John XXIII

has said, there must be drawn a distinction between the content of Faith and its outer garment. Externals may change but the essentials of Faith remain unchanged. The 'Mother Church' had the insight into the working of the mind of man. She had no hesitation to call a halt to the helter-skelter wanderings of the human psyche. For this She furnished a formula of Faith. Affirmation of it, She said, not only clarifies the Faith but also affords a means of deeper commitment of heart and mind. The primary purpose of the formulation of the Creed is that those who became the members of the Church would know what She stands for and what are their commitments. Further, several situations in the life of the visible earthly Ecclesia called for Creed-like formulae and statements of Faith. Preaching, teaching, baptism, confession and polemics were a few of such needs. It is well to recall that the occasion for the proclamation of the Nicæan Creed itself, was to refute the Arian heresy. Chalcedon formula could be viewed either as the starting of a new preaching or the settling of a controversy. If situations demanded codification of 'Creed', 'worship' commanded it. Without the confession of the 'Creed', worship would be incomplete. So it is an Ecclesial mandate, that like the Lord's prayer the Credal proclamation also should be a limb of the Liturgy. Creeds are not extra-Biblical growth. Quite contrarily, it is the Bible that moulds and makes the Creed. Or if we choose, we may say that the 'Creed' is created and controlled by the Bible. It is acknowledged without demurring, that the very words with which each of the articles of the 'Nicæan Creed' in its original form in Greek, started with Pauline phrases as found in the Bible. Credal confession is concisely the Church's understanding of the Scripture. Consequently, there is no dichotomy between the Bible and the Creed. It can be absolutely asserted that the Creed of the Church epitomises the Bible. Today, the 'Creed' is the key and the best guide to hermeneutics. The 'Creed' may not give an exhaustive catalogue on the majesty, magisterium, magnanimity and mercy of the Lord. After all, human words cannot contain or convey the 'Word' eternal. Yet as St. Augustine has asserted, the 'Creed' is an alternative to silence.

**'Oneness' - The first 'notae'**

One of the greatest mysteries of the Bl. Trinity is that even while It is unity, It is a communion of the Father, Son and the Spirit. It logically follows that the Ecclesia which is the 'icon' of the Trinity must be 'One and a Communion', at one and the same time. As Pope John Paul II makes clear in 'Ut Unum Sint', the Trinitarian unity is the divine source of the unity of the Ecclesia. Ontologically the visible Church is established in the Trinitarian model. She is in fact, the body of Christ, forming a spiritual unity with Him. Biblical passages that proclaim the 'Oneness' of the Ecclesia, are galore. Jesus did not come to found 'churches'. He came to found 'the Church'. What Jesus said, when Peter confessed His Messiahship was, 'On this rock I will build my Church'. His priestly prayer as found in John 17, and the activities of the Apostles as recorded in Chapters 2 and 4 of the 'Acts of the Apostles' point to the unity of the Church. Again, a particular action of St. Paul is an excellent illustration of this point. With unflinching zeal Paul argues all out on the organic unity of the Church. In Chap. 12 of his 1st Epistle to Corinthians he expresses: "For, just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ". Adamantly he held that Gentiles could become members of the Church, without being circumcised and observing the Jewish Law. When differences arose on this score Paul himself made concessions as is written in 'Acts' 21. Again, Paul gathered gifts from the 'Gentile' churches, to be offered to the 'Mother Church' at Jerusalem. In order to effectualise the unity of the Church he even risked his life by his journey to Jerusalem. Exhortations, epistles and homilies of antiquarian prelates of the Church also testify to the unity of the Church.

**7. 'The Seamless robe'- symbol of unity**

According to Syrian tradition, besides the Cross, the Scripture and the Eucharist are proofs par excellence of the Ecclesial 'oneness'. A Syriac Liturgical prayer extols the Cross: "as it has appeased the people with

the peoples, that is, Israel with the Gentiles, so that in One Church, they may make entreaty.....". Ignatius of Antioch in his letters to Magnesians, emphasises that the 'one' flesh and the 'one' altar maketh the 'Church' 'One'. Elsewhere, he suggests that Christ's standard rallies His followers everywhere, in the body of His Church. Irenaeus, held the belief in the 'One Church' and made the exclusive claim for it. The prayer that poured out from Polycarp as he faced death was for the 'entire One Catholic Church'. The seamless and undivided robe of Jesus is traditionally held as a symbol of the unity of the Church. St. Ephrem, deemed the divided Church not as the whole or wholesome body but as the wounded corpus of Christ. In short, 'Oneness' is the 'sine qua non' of the Church. Disunity is an ecclesial contradiction. To divide the Church is to destroy Her. Even though the doors of death shall not prevail upon Her, division and disunity may be described figuratively as the death knell of the Ecclesia. Mother Church's is the misfortune and ours is the tragedy that the Latin West relegated, if not replaced the Eucharist and the Scripture, the main visible signs of the 'Oneness' of the 'Church'. Instead it introduced the insignia of 'institution' as the symbol of Unity. The sequel was ruthless Latinisation under the banner of uniformity. The overzealous overlords of Latinization forgot the fact that unity did not mean uniformity and that in variety vests the vitality and vigour of the Church. This process resulted in dire disappointment and disillusionment among the Greek-East and the Syriac-Orient and other nations and peoples. It mounted up and led to the great schism of 1054 and the Protestant Reformation by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others. Even in India, the Church, called the 'St. Thomas Christians' lost her ecclesial identity on account of this policy of uniformity. As Rev. Fr. Dr. Joseph Perumthottam brings out in his doctoral dissertation, 'A Period of Decline of the Mar Thoma Christians' "the missionaries thought that to be honest and obedient towards the 'Holy Mother Church' meant uniformity with the Roman Rite and therefore necessitated the abandoning of the East-Syrian customs". The pseudo synod at Diamper and its sequel,

the Coonan Cross did undermine the unity of the age old Church of St. Thomas in India. But, thanks to the ecclesiological resolve, 'return to resources' and due to the ethos of ecumenism, the West has begun to invoke the "eliminated' and eclipsed ancient symbols of unity.

#### **8. Oneness is not an 'alone' concept**

Clearly, "the Oneness of the Church is not an 'alone' concept" as Rev. Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose very exquisitely and explicitly expresses in her thesis. Christ's parables of 'the vine and the branches' as well as the 'shepherd and the flock', illustrate this. History of early Christianity also provides proofs for the 'plurality' of 'churches'. The 'Church', in the primitive period appears as a vast diffusion of congregations. Each one was a 'church', not because she had her own institution and constitution but because of the divine life pulsing through her. This life-force, was a flow from Christ, like fire to fire. That is to say, that each 'church' was conscious of being a branch of the 'vine', namely Christ. As a guiding principle for the churches and prior to the idea of multiplicity, is the 'Oneness' which each embodies. A church of a locality, if established duly by 'apostolicity' would certainly be a miniature of the One Church. To draw a parallel, a bar magnet, when divided scientifically results in the formation of many a 'mini' magnet maintaining the features of the original one. As the microcosm definitely contains all the aspects of the macrocosm, the 'offspring' churches will be the replica of the 'Mother Church'. The obvious reason is that on account of the 'Divine Life', each local church would enjoy in entirety the presence of Christ and not a fragment of Him. It was through membership in the 'Mother Church', that the early Christians of Africa believed to inherit the grace of Christ. Differences of social, cultural, historical and environmental conditions are legitimate grounds to form various 'churches'. But none of them is an excuse for exclusiveness or sanction for separation. In modern terminology, such a claim would be equal to allowing sociology to overshadow and eclipse ecclesiology besides thwarting theology. Fortunately, the Fathers of the early Church never had the notion that

distinction denoted difference. Their thinking was that each local church, even if enjoyed autonomy, is not autocephalus or self-headed. Rather each provincial or local church formed part of the 'One Universal Mother Church'. This 'Universal Church' is certainly not made of by adding up all these local congregations together or by a few individual churches grouping together like pebbles in a bucket. To illustrate by a modern familiar example, a University is more than the sum of the colleges which make it up. True, in a sense the whole University is present in each of the colleges. Called into existence by God, the visible Ecclesia is no man-made agglomeration. On the contrary, the Church is 'One' even while it is 'a communion of churches' as the conciliar documents of Vat.II, clarify.

### 9. The Divine and the devilish

In conclusion, it is to be emphasised that Ecclesial 'Unity' or 'Oneness' is the Divine decree while separateness or disunity is the device of the devil. 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil' should be the constant chorus of the Church, so that the 'oneness' may not be undermined by forces of the underworld.

### 10. 'Holiness' - The second 'notae'. 'Mother Eve' and 'Mother Ecclesia'

Every kind of thing must be referred to its origin if it is to be evaluated in toto. So to appreciate the 'mark' of 'holiness' of the Ecclesia, Her genesis must not be forgotten. The Ecclesia is holy, because She is called into earthly existence by Him, Who is holiness itself. St. Peter, on whom Jesus founded His Church categorically reminds the Ecclesial community in invigorating words: "We are partakers of the Divine nature". He did not mince words. Rather he goes on to instil confidence by exhilarating expressions. The Church, summoned by Christ, is a "chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood". The 'Breviarium' hails the Church in no matching style. "Hallowed is He, who has established the 'holy' Church on the rock of faith and set in her, apostles, prophets and teachers, knowing

the truth". Words, especially the last few ones, remind the Pauline phrases. Ancient Syriac Fathers, like St. Ephrem and St. John Chrysostom, use a profound imagery to explain the birth of the Church. As Eve was born from the side of Adam, so did the Ecclesia flow from the side of Lord Jesus. For them, the blood that gushed forth from the side of Christ, when it was pierced with the lance of the Roman soldier, is the sign of the birth of the Ecclesia. Since the blood of Jesus is holy and pure the Church must also be so. Furthermore, the Church is holy because She is ever being sanctified by the perpetual presence of the Trinitarian God, Who is holy, now and always. Holiness refers to the calling of the Church and its members. As the visible Church is a collection of heterogenous people, the epithet 'holiness' does not pertain to their worldly character and conduct.

#### **11. 'Bridegroom and the Bride'**

The analogy of the 'Bridegroom and the Bride' found in the NT makes crystal clear the sanctifying activity of Christ. The Lord loved the Church as His Bride and hallowed Her with holiness. Christ is concerned, as any husband is, with the purity and probity of His Bride. Precisely for this, His ongoing work in the visible Church is one of progressive purification. This is for making the Church, seemingly of sinful men and women, a holy entity as it ought to be. This is what St. Paul remarks in his epistle to the Ephesians. "Christ's aim is that He must present the Church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing so that She may be holy and without blemish". Christ performs this by a mystic sacrifice, in continuation of the unique self-sacrifice at the Cross. After Jesus had died, risen and ascended to the right side of the Father, He returned in His Spirit to live in the Church. On account of His living presence in the Church, She has become the temple of the Trinitarian God. That temple which was Christ's body when He was on earth is now the Holy Church. By His precious and pure blood, Christ did purify and purge the Ecclesia of all filth of sin.

## 12. 'We get rid of our sins'

The 'holiness' of the Church is not a man-made quality. The Fathers, who incorporated the notae 'holiness' into the Apostolic and the Nicæan creeds simply gave expression to what was there as inherent elements in the Ecclesia, even in Her celestial existence. As a sequel, the holiness of the Church cleanses us of our iniquities. Indeed, by the intercession of 'Mother Church', 'we get rid of our sins' to adopt the six words that G.K. Chesterton has used in a particular context in his autobiography. An invaluable fortune for the humans! Anything short of perfect 'holiness' could not achieve this marvel for the mortals. As the wife is subject to her husband, so the Church the Bride, should be subject to Christ owning and acknowledging His lordship. This is Her seal for 'holiness', which in the words of John Macquarrie, "is co-operation with the 'letting be' of Being".

## 13. Ransom for Holiness

Basically the word 'holy' means 'separation'. In the 'Scripture' it is used of anything that is separated for God's use from the ways of the world or the ordinary business of life. Naturally it is used for such men and materials. In the OT some places are holy; so too some buildings. Even the utensils, the pans and pots of the Temple are considered holy. In the case of people, the idea of being 'separate' involved more. This is quite natural. People are not like chattels. They are endowed with discriminative faculty or will. If any person wants to be holy, he must surrender himself to the will of God. Of course it is God's great concern to call and create a people as His exclusive possession by making them holy in heart, mind and body. This is what redemption is all about, both in the OT and NT. Yahweh redeemed His people from Egypt by a 'call'. Again by a 'call' He redeems His people from the subjection to sin and satan so that they may be holy and blameless before Him. The fruit of His this action is the Ecclesia. The Church is selectively 'separated' and connected to Christ and Christ alone. The ransom

has been paid for this; not with perishable objects such as silver and gold but with the precious blood of Christ, as Simon, the Kepa, says. Thus God has called into existence a 'holy' people who will be truly His. And this is the Holy Church!, the mystical body of Jesus Christ.

#### **14. The task before the 'sinful'**

The 'holiness' of the Church as God's exclusive possession is well illustrated by the various titles bestowed upon the 'people of God'. One of the common titles for Christians in the NT. especially in the writings of St. Paul, is 'Saint'. This word like 'sanctify' or 'consecrate', comes from the root, meaning holy. These titles entail responsibilities on such people to become worthy of the appellation. Apparently the visible Church contains the well meaning and the evil minded. Christ's parables of the 'net' gathering every kind of objects of the ocean and the other one of the 'field and the tares', are suggestives of this fact. Therefore a task is laid before the 'sinful' people who aspire to find a convenient and comfortable berth in the 'Mother's' lap. The effort is not one of physical labour. It is of the kind of total mental transformation, or metanoia; that is to say 'holiness' is to be acquired. Therefore the Apostles appeal to the people for actual holy living. "As He who called is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" writes St. Peter. St. Paul in his epistle to Corinthians exhorts the members of the Church "to cleanse themselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God". The Church is discharging a duty only and is not exercising a right when in deference to the call of Peter, Paul and the other members of the Apostolic College, She invokes the magisterium. The aim is to maintain Herself and Her children ever holy before Him who is, as the great prophet of the yore, Isaiah, hails thrice, "holy, holy, holy". Once the implication of this process of the 'sinful' folk acquiring holiness is understood, the paradox of depicting the Church simultaneously as 'holy' and 'sinful' would be vindicated.

### 15. Christ's 'dowry' -Sheet-anchor of holiness

The call to be 'holy' shall not be misconstrued as one for monastic or secluded life or for individualism. The earthly Ecclesia will have to associate Herself with the so called 'sinful' and the scum of the society who are in the ordinary tussle and tumble of life. The Church has to go out into the world and at the same time remain "aliens" and exiles or 'untouched' like the lillies of the lagoons and lakes. The Church has the potency to be in the world and yet not of it. How, it may be asked. The answer is, because of Christ's 'dowry'. As is the practice in the East where the bridegroom gives dowry to the bride, so the Church the Bride was offered by Christ the Bridegroom, His own blood as dowry. That bride- money is the 'sheet anchor' of the 'holiness' of the Ecclesia. Consequently, satan and his stooges shall tremble to draw anywhere near the Ecclesia and desecrate Her either collectively or individually.

### 16. 'Catholic' - The third 'notae' - 'Name and Surname'

"Christian is my name, Catholic is my surname" proclaimed, Pacian the 4th century Bishop of Barcelona, in one of his letters to Sympronia. Three deductions can be derived from his usage 'catholic'. First, a geographic, then a legalistic and finally a qualitative one. Apparently, the 'notae', 'catholic' envisages world-wide expansion of the 'Church'. Or as the poet in St. Ephrem has put by using an OT metaphor, the Church had spread as Daniel's sfone had grown. It is history that at Pacian's period, the earthly Ecclesia had extended to all the corners of the then known world, through the blood of the martyrs, biblical preachings of the preceptors and benefits bestowed by the convert Emperors, Constantine and Theodocius. Spatial and territorial expansion as well as numerical maximisation alone will not convey the connotation of 'catholic' in its completeness as it is not a quantitative idea alone. The legalistic meaning stands for the submission to 'one' supreme head, ostensibly the Roman Pope or the Bishop of Rome. True, His primacy was acknowledged at the Council of Nicaea. Ecclesiologists, however, have highlighted the fallacy

in this theory. They explicate that 'catholicity' is not mere legalistic submission to a particular office of a particular Church. Uniformity is not a mark of the unity of the Church. The Church is certainly a "communion of churches". These are the pointers of Vatican decrees. Unity, the Church must have; but, not by doing away with diversity. So the significance of the third interpretation. This is a qualitative one, in the true spirit of the NT meaning and in the original sense of the term 'catholic'. Rightly understood therefore, 'catholic' is a condition of having the quality of catholicity or universality in the liberal sense. This is in fact the cue from the message of the Messiah, regarding the redemptive role of the Ecclesia. Liberalism, not literalism and legalism, is the landmark of the lessons of Lord Christ. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation", "..... to all nations....", ".....until the end of the world....." Thus have Mark and Matthew recorded the words of Jesus. More than spatial expansion, what is discernable in this dictate is a qualitative undertone of universality. The Apostles were to teach a religion, suitable to the whole mankind, in contrast to any elitist expression based on race or nationality. The pre-requisite for a 'Catholic Church', according to Jesus, was not the belief either in the fatherhood of Abraham or in the Mosaic Law. On the other hand it is the faith in the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, that makes the Ecclesia 'Catholic' and 'Universal' according to the Christian 'categorisation' and 'catechesis'.

### 17. 'Katholiki' is fullness

Although no where in the NT, is the epithet 'Catholic' attributed to the Church, the idea is imbedded in it. Ephesians, 1:23 speaks of the catholicity of the Church as "fullness of Christ, who fills all in all". Fullness, certainly, comes from Christ. Wholeness or fullness, or intense integrity, is verily what is imported by 'Katholiki', the Greek term derived from 'Katholou' the root word of 'Catholic'. It was Ignatius of Antioch, who first applied the term 'catholic' as an attribute of the Church. "..... where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church", he wrote to the Church at Smyrna. The

term 'catholic' here conveys the concept of the 'whole' Church. The remark of E.Lanne, the theologian, is absolutely appropriate here. "The local church" he opines "is not just a part of the Catholic Church, but it is the whole Catholic Church in its fullness in a given place". Of course, a local church can be a 'catholic' church, but certainly not 'the' Catholic Church. To put it more explicitly, catholicity is not against the 'unity' 'esse' of the Ecclesia. They are intertwined dual dimensions of the Church. Wherever a church may be, she is what She is in the whole, provided the stamp of 'apostolicity' is imprinted on her.

### **18. All inclusiveness**

Originally the term 'Catholic' meant universality in the sense of all inclusiveness regarding membership. St. Paul's categoric contention is illustrative of this aspect. "There is, in Christ, neither Jew nor Greek, bound nor free, male nor female". The message is absolutely clear. The 'Catholic' Church shall not exclude anybody; but beckon everybody. Invoking the immortal words of Abraham Lincoln, it may be said "with malice towards none, but with charity towards all", the 'Mother Church' would spread the glad tidings of universal salvation to the high and the low in the world. The term 'catholic', therefore, refers to the transcending of man-made barriers of nations, races, languages, status, gender etc., since they are all 'irrelevant', as St. Paul reminds the Galatians. Assuredly, 'Catholic' means that which preserves every tradition. This was the spirit behind the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem. To quote the modern Catholic Encyclopaedia, "as a sign of reconciliation and communication in Christ, the Church must embrace all peoples, classes, races and cultures as its birth on the feast of Pentecost suggests". Undoubtedly, this is the ethos of evangelisation which is an inalienable imperative of the initiator of the Ecclesia.

### **19. Neither a sociological nor a historical concept**

'Catholicity' or universality is not a sociological concept. While adopting the culture of any community, the Church should be vigilant to

preserve Her 'deposit of faith' and 'the traditions' from being eclipsed by excessive inculturation. Syncretism is no synonym for catholicity. Inordinate inculturation tends to undermine the identity of the Church. The Church should always remember that 'culture' is only the context and not the content of Faith. If a Church permits Her patrimony and heritage to be overshadowed and overlooked, Her very being would become a complex of opposites. A sifting process is essential. What is gained in quantity shall not be lost in quality. Likewise, a church which severs her umbilical cord from the 'Mother Church' by sociological, sectarian or even theological factors and allows herself to drift away from her origins, has no legitimacy for claiming 'catholicity'. No mere, peripheral or secular continuity will be enough. 'Catholicity' is a spiritual and religious concept. Further, 'catholicity' is not simply a 'historic' idea. A church which has become oblivious of her original moorings and cut off the roots will not be 'catholic', even by her constant and continuous claim to, or reverberating refrain of, ancestry, antiquity and ancientness. 'Catholic' Church means, a Church having unbroken and uninterrupted 'continuity' from Christ Himself, through 'apostolic succession'. A Church shall not be 'Catholic' by the vestige of the 'once commended' glorious origin. As the celebrated Catholic theologian Hans Kung comments in his monumental work, 'The Church', "venerable memorial of a venerable tradition" will not help a Church to be 'Catholic' in spirit. Preserving the identity intact, the Catholic Church must move amidst and among varying verities, varieties, vistas and environments.

## 20. 'Catholic' means Orthodox

Certain other connotations of the concept 'Catholic' are also to be assessed. From the 3rd century downward, the concept 'Catholic' had gained the meaning of 'Orthodoxy'. This was the result of an edict of Emperor Theodosius. 'The Ecclesia Catholici' that is, the total all embracing Church became the only lawful religion in the Roman Empire. In legal terminology, 'catholicity' became 'orthodoxy' defended by law. The

persecuted Church of the early eras became a privileged one in the post-Constantine period. With legality as the shield and orthodoxy as the sword, the Church could anathematise, denounce and excommunicate the apostates, schismatics and the heretics, in the polemics that ensued. St. Augustine uses the term 'catholic' in this sense of 'orthodox faith', especially in his disputations with the Donatists, a sect of Africa. It is of interest to note that when the term 'catholic' was used in the 'Nicæan Creed', it had the sense of standard doctrine. This was the meaning in the other ecumenical Creeds as well. It is commented by Daniel Lamont, in his treatise, 'The Church and the Creeds' as follows. "The holy Catholic Church, the phrase when first uttered in the 'Apostles' Creed, around 450 A.D., would convey the same impression as the 'Holy Orthodox Church' conveys to a Russian today". This would exactly be the meaning that a Syrian Orthodox Christian would also ascribe to the 'notae' 'Catholic'. Stressing on the quality of the term, St. Vincent Lerins, the 5th century monk and theologian also gave a precise definition of 'catholicity' in his heresiography called 'Commonitaria'. His definition has come to be known the, 'Vincentian Canon'. He explains 'Catholicity' in the sense of Orthodoxy, "as that which is believed every where and always by all men". It may be noted in passing, that modern theologians like Cardinal Frazelin, do not deem St. Vincent's views as exclusive since they do not encompass the later legitimate developments. Of course, they are acknowledged authoritative. St. Cyril, the 4th Century prelate of Jerusalem, has provided a comprehensive conception of the term 'Catholic'. This is by combining the elements of earlier definitions. In his 'Catechesis' he describes that a Church is 'Catholic' if She extended to the ends of the earth, taught true doctrines, opened the doors of godliness to all men and healed every kind of sin.

## 21. Martin Luther's view

Until Luther's time, the 'Fathers of the Church' were emphasising that apostolicity, orthodoxy of faith based on the Scripture, celebration of

Sacraments and ministry were the salient features of the 'Catholic' Church. The Protestant Reformation did upset this notion and these norms as well. The protagonists of Protestantism, propagated the theory that the Scripture is the sole source of sanction behind the Church. As this thinking neglects the nourishment the Church does draw from 'the Tradition', this is deemed by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christendom, as not a whole and wholesome view.

## **22. The vision and the ideal**

Openness without ignoring the identity, dedication and the will to witness Lord Christ, are what which affix the 'notae' 'Catholic' on the Ecclesia. This was the grand vision and immaculate ideal of the Divine Founder, of the Spirit-filled Apostles and of the holy Fathers, whose life blood was the bounty for the birth and life of the Ecclesia.

## **23. 'Apostolic' - The fourth 'notae' - Distinguish the real from the unreal**

'Lead us to the real from the unreal'. This has been the eternal supplication of every thinking human ever since he or she faced the fleeing and the fleeting phenomena of Nature. Obviously, mankind does not lack the wisdom to distinguish the holy and the profane. The claim of the Church to 'Oneness', 'Holiness' and 'Catholicity' will be acknowledged, only when the mortal feels them to be really present in the Ecclesia. This conviction arises as and when man or woman realises the Church to be of Divine origin either directly from Christ Himself or through delegated divine decree. Jesus founded the earthly Ecclesia in accordance with the Divine 'Salvific Scheme' and then delegated the authority to the Apostles to establish the extension of the 'One, Holy, Catholic' Church everywhere. This delegated divine right is called theologically, 'apostolicity'. In order of priority, therefore, 'apostolicity' is apparently the fountain-head of the other three 'essentials' of the Ecclesia.

## 24. Did Christ establish the visible Ecclesia on the 'Apostolic College'?

Sceptics cast two doubts on the 'Apostolicity' or the 'Apostolic' 'notae' of the Church. Did Christ found a visible Church on the 'Apostolic College', headed by Simon or were the followers given the 'freedom' to form groups according to their own beliefs? If so, are they still at liberty to organise any type of congregation, they ask. The answer to the first question is an emphatic 'yes'. It naturally renders the second doubt superfluous.

## 25. The props to the positive answer

The positive reply to the first query is drawn from three sources. They are the beliefs of the primitive Christians, historical proofs that the Ecclesia was not the product of secular influences and thirdly, the internal evidences of NT themselves. This concisely is the scholarly opinion of Canon Charles Gore, the Protestant theologian of the 19th century, in his authoritative book, 'The Church and the Ministry'.

## 26. Early Christians and the Heathens

The early Christians, especially those three thousand who embraced Christianity on the first Pentecost day, did so out of a deep conviction. They believed beyond doubt, that Peter and the Apostles were proclaiming the 'good news', the gospel, with the authority they received from the redeemer Christ and from the all directing Paraclete. On receiving baptism from the Apostles, they believed that the power of the risen Christ would run through their arteries. Naturally, disregarding the displeasure of the powers that might be, they ingrafted themselves into the Ecclesia. Ingenuous lot they might have been! But it is Divine Wisdom, that riddles are unravelled more often to the simple than to the sophisticated. As yet another supplementary support, it may be adduced from the annals of history, that the then heathens also considered the Christians as a closely knit congregation or group with its religious rites and rituals as prescribed by a divine person named Jesus.

### 27. Agape and the Guild feast

Adverting to the second source, it is to be admitted that in the Apostolic period there was the invading influence of the guilds and associations. Hence the suggestion that the Ecclesia was modelled after them. Yet, resemblances vanish on close approach and differences become distinguishable. St. Paul foils the fallacy of equating the agape of the Primitive Church with the communal meal of the guilds. As John Knox the Scottish Protestant writer remarks in the book 'The Early Church and the coming great Church', "the Church is not an adhoc response to the gnostic threat either". Writings of the early defenders of Christianity, called the 'Apologists', especially of the 2nd century Aristides and Theophilus of Antioch also point out the existence of the Church with divine sanction behind Her. For Theophilus, the Church "is a fertile and well inhabited island in the sea which has harbours of truth to welcome and give security to the storm tossed souls". Thought provoking description indeed! As a true 'Church Father' he warns against the heretics who cast aspersions on the Ecclesia and cast their nets to 'net in' the guideless, guileless and the gullible.

### 28. Jesus' own method - Esoteric

Thirdly, arguments from within the NT are almost axiomatic. Even a random reading of the relevant remarks of the Gospels would drive home that Jesus adopted a 'selection' process before he opened the treasure-chest of redemptive secrets and sanctification. The summary of 'selection' is as follows. On his return from the wilderness to Galilee, He calls Simon and his brother Andrew, then James and his brother John. The true tenor of His words to them, "I will make you to become fishers of men", is indicative of their future 'Apostolate'. His 'selective scheme' is marked by the avoidance of 'popular touch' and the subsequent 'retirements'. Yes, the 'rabbi' 'retires' with his adherents to the shores of the sea of Galilee; then he ascends the mountain. He calls "whom he himself would." Christ thus forms the 'outer ring' of His disciples. Within this circle, Jesus

constitutes the twelve, whom as Luke testifies, "He named Apostles". Mark the words "He made" in the Gospel of Mark, as he narrates these happenings or developments. Christ created an office, the 'Apostolate'. Jesus then "began to send them forth to the villages of Galilee". Nor would Jesus erect the edifice of the Ecclesia on the shifting sands or rolling rubbles, the riff-raff. Rather, He would do so, on Simon's rock-like belief. That too, only after obtaining from him the formal confession of Messiahship. Jesus would not cast the pearls before the swines. So, he selected a faithful few. Jesus finally limited the number of Apostles at twelve, as Mark and Luke record. He then initiated them into the mysteries of baptism, ministerial priesthood etc. In no ambiguous words Jesus promulgated the decree that what the Apostles bound or lose on earth would be so in heaven and whose sins they forgive are to be forgiven, whose sins they retain to be retained. Besides, in no unmistakable manner Jesus commanded, as recorded in Mt. 10, "He who hears you hears me". To Peter, he handed over the keys of the 'Kingdom of God'. The Eucharist, which is the consummating event of the establishing of the Ecclesia on the earth, was celebrated by Christ in camera; of course in the presence of the twelve, whom as John says, Jesus called "His own and loved them unto the end". The element of esoterism is evident in all these acts of Christ. The Eucharist became theirs by virtue of the conditions which Christ stipulated. Only through the Apostles and as they transmitted does the Eucharist pass on to the community. The words of beatitude are for the multitude to meditate and live by; but the 'words of institution' are for the Apostles and their successors to celebrate in anamnesis and for the laity to partake. In short, Jesus founded the earthly Ecclesia on Himself as the corner stone, Peter as the foundation stone and the Apostles as the college of ministers. The implied doctrine is that the 'other Apostles' could establish extension of the 'One' Church, with the acquiescence, if not with the patent permission of Peter. There is no bypass for establishing a Church.

### 29. 'Shelihah' - root of the term Apostle

The notae 'Apostolic', obviously is an adjective of the term 'Apostle' which comes from the Syriac word 'Shelihah', with the root 'Shlah'. It may mean messenger, missionary or ambassador. Apostolicity is a constitutive element or a foundational aspect of the Church. To appreciate the 'notae' 'apostolic', the role of the Apostles with regard to the Ecclesial formation must be analysed and amplified. The choice of the twelve to the apostolic status is sometimes interpreted in an eschatological milieu. However, Hans Kung opines that the role played by the Apostles in the early history of the Church is more significant. He goes on to add, "the twelve are the fundamental witnesses of Christ's resurrection. This is part of the central tradition which Paul received from the primitive community and handed on to his communities".

### 30. Apostles 'fish mankind'

Christ entrusted with the Apostles, the 'net of his teaching' to fish mankind, as Bedjan puts, in the Liturgical book 'Breviarium'. The Apostles were empowered with the gift of the gab or tongue by the Holy Spirit. They became possessed with the 'experiential knowledge' of the Trinitarian mysteries. Then they began to preach and teach the Holy Trinity. Through these spirit suffused 'shelihahs', the earthly Ecclesia became a wider reality and a 'Divine-human' combine.

### 31. The Nucleus of the Church

The remark of Rev.Sr.Dr. Sophy Rose regarding the Apostles, "they serve as the conscience of the Church" would speak volumes. It is a truth that the Church had Her origin and organisation around the nucleus, the 'Apostolic Collegium'. St. Paul gives a very exhaustive and clear catalogue of the conspicuous role of the Apostles. As for Paul, they were authorised to found and lead churches, to bring discipline in the corporate life of the Ecclesia, to perform baptism, to celebrate the Eucharist. This information can be gathered from his epistles to the Corinthians. St. Paul reminds the

Ephesians, through chap 4 of his epistle, that the 'apostle' is the first in the Church. But he also remarks that the aim of the Apostle is not subjection but service or 'diaconia'. In fact, this was the great vision of the 'Great Master'.

### **32. Testimony from the 'Acts of the Apostles'**

Post-Resurrection narratives also confirm the 'special separation' of the twelve. The seclusion of the twelve in the 'upper room', is just one instance. Yet another is, the command in Mt. 28:16. Further, 'Acts' 2:41 testifies: "They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching". As John Macquarrie remarks in his book cited, "faithfulness to the Apostles appears as a mark of the NT Church in its earliest period". The doctrine of the 'Church of England' is equally explicit when it states in Her doctrine, "from the first, there was the fellowship of believers finding its unity in the twelve". In the 'Acts', the Church is seen as entering upon Her career as an organised body. Thereupon, the Apostles are being differentiated from the 'brethren'. In the selection of the deacons, the brethren were asked to find out seven from among themselves. These seven were set apart, with the 'laying on' of the hands by the Apostles. Apostolic 'transmission' and its corollary 'apostolic succession' were thus inaugurated by the holy Apostles. Verily, the NT narrative is an advocacy for 'apostolicity' and 'apostolic succession'.

### **33. Doctrine of Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession**

The theory is that, Christ, after establishing the earthly Ecclesia, implanted in Her a recognizable unity and cohesion. He furthermore granted to Her the stewards or the Apostles and the sanction to them to perpetuate the authoritative ministry through ordaining successors. In the early periods, when heretical sects sprang up within Christianity due to the influence of gnostic notions, the authentic Christian community had to distinguish itself by establishing its connection and continuity of faith with the Apostles. Doctrinally, apostolicity means constancy and consistency of faith; apostolic succession implies the following of the

faith, confession and witness of the Apostles. Through the application of apostolicity, the Church maintains Her identity throughout the aeons and ages. Forms of faith may vary from time to time. But fundamentals remain the same. Maintaining of apostolicity is thus a commission of Christ and a duty of the disciples. Down from the second century, Episcopate became the expression of apostolicity. The Orthodox theologian, R. Kereszty records in the treatise, 'The Unity of Church', that according to Irenaeus, the 2nd century prelate, the Apostles "handed over the Church at every place to the bishops". The bishop could check the centrifugal and schismatic tendencies in his Church because his authority rested on apostolic continuity and orthodox faith.

#### **34. Apostolic continuity and Link**

It is conceded that 'apostolic' is not found in the NT as a 'notae' of the Church. At the same time, in the succeeding patristic period it was in wide usage. It was Ignatius, the successor of Peter to the Throne of Antioch, who employs this term as a 'notae' for the first time. Polycarp projects this 'notae' at his martyrdom. This 'notae' apparently implies the continuity of a church at a given period with that Church which an Apostle, as a member of the 'collegium', founded. The Apostles transmitted their mission to the Church, which they summoned and ministered. In other words, it establishes that the Church, as it exists at present, is the same as the Church whose genesis and growth are graphically given in the 'Acts of the Apostles'. Through this continuity, the link of the Church to God the Father, through Christ and by the Spirit, is established. This formal stamp and sanction for official ministry, every man and woman would ask for, before submitting to receive any spiritual sacrament. The ordinary believer would recall that Lord Jesus Himself launched His public ministry only after submitting Himself to John the Baptist and obviously after the Paraclete descended upon Him, from the high heavens. The simple and the straightforward Christian will not easily forget the account in 'Acts' 8. Philip, though he evangelises Samaria, cannot complete his work, without

the intervention of the Apostles of Jerusalem. So also, the metaphor of Church as an edifice and the apostolicity of the Church as founded on 'Kepa', the 'rock' will also be fresh in the memory of the ordinary Christian.

### **35. Apostolic Succession-The mode**

How is Apostolic succession effected? This may be actualised in two ways. Either directly through the Apostle, who acting as an 'authorised representative' of Christ, to use St. Paul's phrase, founded the Church and appointed ministers. Or indirectly, by the duly and uninterruptedly ordained inheritors of the patrimony of the Apostles. Two factors are involved here. Someone, who has the 'rightful spiritual authority' transmits or bestows the 'Christ-experience', 'the deposit of faith' or in short, the 'spiritual power' to somebody else called technically, the successor, along with the authorisation to pass it on to the succeeding generations, as and when required. The 'successor' or ordainee receives them in spiritual submission to the bestower or ordainer. In effect, the ordainer transmits, the ordainee receives. From the Apostolic times downwards this rite was not performed by mere word of mouth only but along with some physical act like the 'laying on' of the hands on the head of the candidate or by anointing him with oil etc. to the accompaniment of some rituals which are generally esoteric. The underlying doctrine is that by the act of epiclesis, the ordainer invokes the Holy Spirit to descend and be ever present by His marvellous grace on the ordainee and make him worthy to minister the Ecclesia. This may be briefly branded as initiation into the holy orders of the Church. As all these are spiritual in dimensions, they are all holy and ever to be hallowed. Secular considerations of any sort shall not be permitted to interfere in the forming of judgement on the 'flow' of spirituality. The receiver becomes a duly eligible partaker of the 'Apostolic Traditions' by 'Apostolic Succession'. This is the kernel of the doctrine.

### 36. Calvin too, for Apostolicity

Apart from occasional administrative tussles and power struggles, the entire Ecclesial history is the record of the earnest endeavour of the Christian Community to preserve Apostolicity and to partake in the 'deposit of faith and Christ-experience' of the holy Apostles. No wonder, the Church considers those who denigrate this doctrine as heretics. The Church was not created by a group of religious men banding together to form one. She was formed by the will of God the Father, the Sacrament of Jesus and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Summarily, She is the gift of the Triune God in fulfilment of the mysterious 'Salvific Plan'. Better organisations, human expertise, modern methods, catch phrases, or any other paraphernalia would not build the Church. To be worthy of the name Ecclesia, She should trace Her chart to Christ, through Apostolic ancestry or lineage. The stress on the necessity and role of the ordained ministry is not more strongly put than the one given by John Calvin, the ultra revolutionary. In the 'Institute of Christian Religion', Calvin contends that "the Church cannot be kept safe, unless supported by those guards to which the Lord has been pleased to commit its safety". The Church does not exist to perpetuate the memory of a great man, who is dead and gone for ever. If the case were so, the Church would have been but the body of Jesus mummified. This is blasphemy. The Church, certainly is no 'mummy', no lingering memorial of a past mortal, born of a woman in a manger. When everything fears time, time fears the Ecclesia. This is precisely because She is ever suffused with the Spirit of the Lord and by virtue of the prerogative of apostolicity. Verily the 'gates of Hades' will ever remain bolted by the pleadings and prayers of the 'Apostolic Church'.

### 37. 'Imitation of Christ'

The quadrilateral 'notae' constitute the Ecclesia in Her externals and essentials. The more, the 'Imitation of Christ' is effected through these

notae the greater will be the vitality of the Church through their full blossoming. Then will She become the worthy Bride of the Bridegroom, Christ the Lord.

## CHAPTER IV

# SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

### 1. "If thou wilt be saved....." Martin Luther

Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk turned reformer, who nailed ninetyfive theses at the door of the Cathedral of Wittenburg in Germany, did not nail the telling thesis that the secrets of the sacred Ecclesia are mediated to the mortals through Sacraments. Though adamant to reform certain repulsive religious rituals, he was ardent enough to replenish the roots of religion. It is on record that Luther asserted, "if thou wilt be saved, thou must begin with the faith of the sacraments". This is quoted by Dr. Whale, in his book 'Christian Doctrine'. Luther knew very well that the Scripture and the Traditions cum the Sacraments are the warp and woof of the fabric of the Ecclesia which is an eternal 'extension of the Incarnation'. Therefore he held that the same 'Word of God' is manifested in the 'Preaching' and the 'Sacraments'. In essence it was his view that they belong together and form one corpus. If Luther had acknowledged only baptism, penance and the eucharist as the three 'dominical' 'Sacraments' and had not approved 'confirmation or chrism', 'matrimony', 'holy orders' and 'unction' as sacraments it is a sad story. May be, he detected or discerned in them, certain 'degenerate' dogmas of the Roman Papacy, his bete noire. Be that as it may.

### 2. The Divine Link of Sacraments -Contention of Calvin

The wonder is that the more radical revolutionary John Calvin too, subscribed himself to the view that Sacraments are seals or confirmation

of the promise of God to mankind in Christ. 'Institute' IV: 14, of Calvin, is a classic commentary on the divine origin of the Sacraments. Unabashingly he proclaims, "there is never any sacrament without any antecedent promise of God, to which it is subjoined as an appendix'. Although Calvin had accepted only Baptism and the Eucharist as Sacraments, what is significant is that he readily recognized the link of the Sacraments with the Divine. Prejudices apart, it has to be approved that the 'Reformers' affirmed the objective reality of the Divine presence in the Sacraments. The assertion of the 'Oxford movement' which made rapid strides a few decades ago and evoked enthusiastic response from the educated youngsters of England, may be referred to as a conclusion of this argument. In the preface to their first volume of the 'Tract for the Times', it is candidly clarified that the "Sacraments, not preaching, are the sources of Divine Grace". It is experience, that man does not get full spiritual satisfaction from 'preached' word alone. He wants 'visible signs' too to quench his quest after the metaphysical and the mystical. Herein lies the value of the Sacraments. As is very concisely put in the treatise, 'The Christian Sacrament' by James. S. Candlish, 'Sacraments are signs and means of grace'. Concisely this is the theology of the Sacraments.

### **3. The Alpha and the Omega of Christ's ministry**

Even the eventful episodes of the public ministry of Lord Jesus Himself, would vouch voluminously on the necessity and efficacy of the Sacraments. It is conceded, that Jesus never used the word 'Sacraments' as the term signifies today. It must be added at the same time that He solemnised certain actions without specifying them 'Sacraments'. As was His usual way of doing things, He solemnised these 'actions' for the glory of God. In modern theological terminology, many of His such actions are 'Sacraments'. The alpha and the omega of His ministry are accentuated respectively by the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. As these two

are vividly recorded in the Gospels they are identified as 'Gospel Sacraments', even by the Reformers.

#### 4. "The highest cannot be spoken..."

The starting and the finishing of Christ's public life by 'Sacraments' cannot be a streak. Jesus knew very well, what the poet Goethe of Germany generalised eighteen centuries later; "the highest cannot be spoken. It can only be acted". So Jesus sheepishly submitted Himself to John the Baptist, to be immersed in the waters of river Jordan and be initiated into public ministry. When 'His hour' drew nigh, He broke the bread, drank the wine from the chalice, and instituted the Holy Eucharist, amidst the awe-stricken and amazed Apostles. Verily, His actions spoke louder than words. There is a rationale for His actions. The ordinary run of mankind can neither apprehend nor appreciate abstract metaphysical concepts. The average man would accept and acknowledge them only when presented in palpable and perceivable forms. This is what Jesus performed by 'instituting the Sacraments'. The description, 'instituted by Christ' is not to be taken in the literal sense. It is not meant that Jesus provided the phrases and gestures to each and every Sacrament. Nor does it signify that the historical Jesus instituted the Sacraments at a specific period or at a particular time. Are they then the contrivances of the Church? No. Reference must be made to the comment of the theologian, F.D. Joret, in the book 'the Eucharist and the Confessional'. "The Sacraments are not ecclesiastical inventions; Jesus Himself is their author. The Church has done nothing more than to formulate and adapt to the needs of the time, the expressive signs which Her founder had entrusted to Her".

#### 5. Word turned to flesh

When the Apostles became filled with the Holy Spirit, they imbibed the true spirit, significance and substance of the actions of their Master.

Thereupon, they concretised His teachings and parables. As their Master was the 'Word turned flesh' to found the Ecclesia, the Apostles and their successors the bishops, turned the words of their Master to 'flesh' in the form of Sacraments to fortify the Ecclesia. Here, in their actions, they invoked the 'dominical' magisterium that they had received from Christ, the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Thus were sown the seeds of the 'other' sacraments. As a born Jew and well-versed in the words of Torah and in the wisdom of the Talmud of Judaism, Jesus must have been well conversant with the rabbinic canon, that whatever the representatives do is on the explicit authority of their master. So, once it is acknowledged that the Church is founded by Christ as His Sacrament, or as Vat II qualifies, 'the primordial sacrament' it would logically entail that the Sacraments which the Church 're-enact' must have the sufferance and sanctification of the Founder Himself. On examination it can be detected that almost all the Sacraments accepted by the Roman and Orthodox Churches have their root or 'idea' or 'substance' in an act or instruction of Jesus. Similar is the case regarding the 'inexplicables', expressed by the terms, 'the mysteries' or 'Raza' used by the Assyrian Church of the East. Thus it must be admitted that these Sacraments are not the shallow and shadowy specifications of the Church but the mandates of Christ Himself. Truly, they are not the dictates of the Ecclesia but the dispensation of the Trinitarian God. To put it in theological terminology, the Church is only the efficient cause, the Triune God being the primary cause. In this context it must be emphasised that while the Church sponsors the Sacraments, the Sacraments in their turn seal the Church. In other words, the Sacraments are both the fort and forte of the Ecclesia. According to Rev. Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose, "The Church, on the one hand, is the vehicle of Sacraments, and on the other hand, the Sacraments are the means of sanctification of the Church".

### 5. Life is not an essay on logic

The Sacraments may be considered to be mere re-enactments of a drama without any logical basis and hence of little value by the sceptic and the secularist. Yet, the sustaining spiritual strength and vitality in the life of the Ecclesia is from the sanctification She receives through the Sacraments. The Sacraments are assuredly the inevitable or indispensable essentials of Ecclesial life and Christian charity. It is becoming evident that faith cannot be maintained by a parade of high sounding words, haranguing and hymn singing. As in the past, so in the present too, the 'Reformers' are falling under the spell of Sacraments. The affirmation of the Methodist theologian, James F. White in his 'Introduction to Christian Worship' is of relevance here. "Much of Christianity today is in a stage of recovery of the early practices and concepts". Why? History affords the answer. Human history is proof that logic and life seldom go hand in hand; they are strange bed fellows. Life is not an essay on logic. Nor logic a lullaby on life. As the Syrian Orthodox Theologian, Bishop Paulose Mar Gregorius observes in the book 'Joy of Freedom', "that which is beyond logic and exact concepts must find expression in the words and in action by rubrics". Very true. Man is in need of a body language besides the vocal one to actualise the Sacraments. Thereby, he or she may comprehend the spiritual truths at least partially. Sacraments involve words. Still the use of actions and the attuning of other objects are more important in 'Sacraments'. For, they impinge on other senses and delve down deep into the conscious and subconscious levels of the human psyche. John Macquarrie opines in the treatise cited earlier, "The Word needs the concreteness and breadth of sacraments, while the sacraments need the conceptual and the intelligible structure afforded by the Word". Here is an undertone to emulate the early ecclesial Fathers. For, they had cleared all their doubts about the Sacraments by continuous contemplation constant cogitation, silence, solitude and elevating exercises.

## 7. Evolution of the terms 'Mysterion' and 'Sacramentum'

The Apostolic Fathers realised fully the significance of the words and deeds of Christ. Therefore they evolved certain rites and eventually couched them in signs and symbols. Subsequently they christened them 'Sacraments'. Here again, it is to be admitted that, this term is not Biblical as it is not seen anywhere in the Bible. Nonetheless rites which are 'sacraments' in 'kind' and 'type' are seen in the OT. Circumcision, Passover and Sacrificial cultus, which all are based on the Sinai Covenant are a few examples. Originally, the word used in the NT, for what we signify today 'Sacraments', was the Greek word 'mysterion', meaning mystery in the English language. 'Mysterion' denoted the pagan cults people were initiated into. St. Paul's writings develop the meaning in different ways. Of which, two, namely sacred secret and its manifestations are basic. Eusebius of Caesarea, who is acknowledged the father of 'Church History', took up this word mysterion and called baptism by it. The term 'Sacrament' is the English derivation of the Latin 'Sacramentum'. This word is derived from the root 'sacrare' which could mean, a thing or person or object constituted by divine right or a function reserved for public authority. Sacramentum was used to signify the person who performed the consecration, the act of consecration itself and the things consecrated. Also, it meant the religious ceremony of the Latin speaking primitive peoples, on the occasion of proclaiming allegiance to their commander, country, emperor or gods. The Roman soldiers added flavour to this function. Tertullian adopted the word 'sacramentus' as an equivalent of the Greek 'mysterion' and treated baptism as a sacrament as Eusebius did. This was quite a natural sequel of the legal temperament of Tertullian. As in the 'sacramentum', he discerned in baptism also, the element of promise of fidelity; of course, not to the earthly emperor but to the heavenly Emperor, Christ. Therefore, the personal pledge of baptism is to be the dominating factor in the life of every Christian.

## 8. Old wine in new bottles

The number of Sacraments has varied from two to twelve or to thirty, as some say, during the early and medieval periods of Ecclesial history. On the authority of Dr. J.N.D. Kelly's, scholarly treatise, 'Early Christian Doctrines', the following facts may be adduced. Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Rome and Cyril of Alexandria, considered, 'baptism', 'chrism' and the 'eucharist' only, as Sacraments. For Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom, 'holy orders' and 'penance' too were Sacraments. As for Augustine, Kelly opines, "anything might be a sacrament which is a token, natural or conventional, of divine reality. So he can include under the term such rites as the 'blessed salt' handed to the catechumens, baptismal exorcism and the formal tradition of instructing creed and the Lord's prayer to catechumens... On the other hand, he speaks of the few most salutary sacraments of the Gospel. The instances he gives are Baptism and the Eucharist". From the fifth century downwards, the trend towards recognizing seven rituals as major ones is seen in Church circles. Yet, it was only with the absolute assertion of Archbishop Peter Lombard of France, that Western Christianity fixed the number at seven. Besides explaining Sacraments, Lombard effected the distinction between sacraments and sacramentals. Upholding Augustinian doctrine, Lombard contended that while Sacraments are vehicles or signs carrying and conveying divine grace to men, sacramentals are simply signs sans grace. Nevertheless, sacramentals too are part of the sign language of the Liturgy. They include a wide variety of rites instituted by the Church. Sometimes they are referred to as "little sacraments". Their primary aim is of course to dispose men to receive the spiritual effects of Sacraments. Occasionally, they are employed to aid men in their temporal or worldly needs. Thus, there are prayers for health, rain, harvest, house warming etc. Their efficacy depends upon the intercession of the Church. The distinction between Sacraments and sacramentals must be clear enough.

Sacraments are instituted by Christ directly or on derived authority by His successors, as concretisation of the instructions of their Lord and Master, Christ. In other words, Sacraments are instituted immediately or mediately by Christ. Their effect is the direct flow of grace without the intercession of the Church. Whereas, 'sacramentals' are ecclesially instituted and require the mediation or impetration of the Church for effectiveness. Lombard enumerated as examples, holy water, prayers and religious objects, as 'grace' is absent in them. The fourth Lateran Council officially named and enumerated the seven sacraments. They are Baptism, Chrism, Penance, Marriage, Holy Orders, Unction and Eucharist. Since then, these are accepted as such by the Roman Church. The Orthodox Churches, by and large accept these seven; the Assyrian Church of the East, however, has not acknowledged Marriage and Unction as Sacraments. But, 'Holy Leaven' and the 'Sign of the Cross', are Sacraments to this Church, according to part II of the booklet 'The history and doctrine of this most ancient Church of the East'. The Reform Churches do not recognize this list of seven, for want of Biblical evidence of them being instituted by 'historical' Christ. Curiously however, there is no unanimity of opinion among the Reform Churches on the number. While Luther recognized baptism, penance and the eucharist, Calvin acknowledged only baptism and the eucharist. The 'unrecognized' 'sacraments' are recognized by the Reformers as 'religious ceremonies' only, even while acknowledging them to have been established by 'divine ordinances'. A wit is constrained to comment, 'what is there in the new name; is it not the old wine in new bottles'. An important point is overlooked by some, while commenting on the stance of 'conservative' Churches. When the Roman and the Orthodox Churches uphold that the 'Sacraments', other than baptism and the holy Eucharist, too are 'instituted' by Christ, it is not to be taken as mentioned earlier, in the literal sense that the 'historical' Jesus established them by 'word of mouth' or a direct act. Quite contrarily, what is conveyed is that

they are the gifts of God the Father, Son and the Spirit, through the Apostles and their successors, the bishops. In simple terms, Jesus implanted the idea of these Sacraments in His beloved Apostles, through adequate actions and parables to develop in the fullness of time. In modern phraseology, it may be called the doctrine of 'implied authority'. The findings of John Macquarrie go a long way to resolve the dispute over the sacraments among the Conservative, the Reform, Episcopal and the Congregational Churches in Christendom. He points out that the modern Biblical scholarship hesitates to pronounce with certainty, just what Christ had instituted and what had arisen in the evolution of the Church. So he argues that the distinction between the so called 'dominical sacraments and the other sacraments becomes indefinite'.

#### **9. Sacramental Theology - Its beginnings - Augustine, Isidore and Theodore**

In spite of identifying and naming Sacraments, a systematic sacramental theology was not fully formed either by the Eastern or Western Fathers, during the fourth and fifth centuries. It is true that certain ideas which were to full and fructify in the medieval period did emerge in this era. Western Christians seem to have approved the formula of Augustine and of Isidore of Pelusium. Augustine assumed that Sacraments are the "visible signs of the invisible grace" of the Blessed Trinity. But the fifth century prelate Isidore insisted upon the secret nature of the Sacraments. Combining the doctrines of Augustine and Isidore, Theodore of Mopsuestia enunciated a new dogma. "Every sacrament", he pointed out, "is the indication, by means of signs and symbols, of invisible and ineffable realities". The Syrian Orthodox Christian theology on Sacraments in general can be concisely put as follows. "Sacraments are also called mysteries". So mention the Orthodox Archbishop, Gheevarghese Dionysius Vattasseril, in the catechetical manual 'Mathopadesasaram'. They have significance beyond the comprehension of the senses and hence to be realised through the inner eyes, by fixing them on the Lord.

The Syrian tradition holds that one gets access to the "Sacrament-mysteries" through the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

#### 10. The Sacraments represent and re-present Christ

Even though the 'Mother Church' did not define Sacraments in the medieval period or since, but has inchoatively dealt with their characteristics, discreet doctrines of Sacramental theologies were promulgated by scholars. The theologians emphasised that the Lord has chosen His bride, the Church, as the primary Sacrament because She is the 'spring of sanctification' and salvation. Further, Christ has entrusted the Ecclesia with the power to sanctify all those who approach Her. Sacraments are obviously the means of grace. As Pope Leo XIII has said in *Sermo 74* "Whatever visible in Christ has passed over to the Sacraments of the Church". The essence of this theology is exquisitely presented by John Macquarrie, "The Church represents and re-presents Christ. She represents Christ in its ministry, re-presents Christ in the sense of making Him present in the world. Sacraments are the vehicles which re-present Christ, or bring the primordial revelation, into the present experience of the community". God manifests and presents Himself through the phenomena called Sacraments and through this epiphany grants grace and confers wholeness. It should not be forgotten that the 'Preached Word' too performs this, in another manner. In other words, both the Sacraments and the 'Preached Word' have their specific roles in making the presence of the Being among the community. Two 'acts' in the Eucharistic celebration illustrate this, when the Gospel is read during the Eucharist, the 'Book' is elevated, to make it the focal point of the Divine presence, at 'consecration', the 'Host' is elevated, to make it the focus.

#### 11. Channels of Grace

The Episcopal Churches hold that Sacraments are the sure sources of the powers that emanate from the ever living and life giving corpus of Christ, which is visible in the form of the Ecclesia. More than words,

Sacramental 'acts' bring more 'grace' because of the inherent effectiveness. Realising this, the Roman, Reform and Orthodox Churches began to teach that Sacraments are actions of the Trinitarian God, through the instrumentality of the Ecclesia. Another instruction was that in the Sacraments, the faithful come into full communication with God and communion with His mysteries. This is what is delineated by Rev. Fr. Herbert Mc Cabe in the "Teaching of the Catholic Church". "In the sacraments" he suggests "God shows us what He does and does what He shows us". In brief, the Church developed the theology that the Sacraments are verily the channels of God's grace. They are the means for Divine blessings. The grace of Christ touches the heart of everyone, with an invitation soliciting an affectionate response of just one single emotively surcharged word 'Abba' or 'Father'. This loving response is the essence of worship, despite its many manifest forms. That is why, it is often reiterated that through Sacraments, worship reaches its transcendental dimensions or becomes 'god intoxication'. In ordinary words, worship will be worth its name only at this stage. The response is possible, of course, only from the faithful and the 'meek in heart' or from those who wait and listen. In fact, faith is the foundational quality for an effective existence in the Ecclesia. Faith, however, is not the result of any action of any of the cognitive faculties of man. It is said to be an existential attitude of the individual, which negativates the crises in the apparent temporality in human life. Through faith, to adopt the aphorism of Aquinas, as taken from the 'Office of Corpus Christi', "we perceive within ourselves the fruit of redemption". In other words, even while 'accepting facticity' or the hard harshness of the world, man is encouraged by faith, towards 'commitment' to fulfil the inherent potentiality. So faith is neither a luxury nor a comfort; but a necessity for human existence. As Bonhoeffer insists in "Letters and papers from Prison", faith is not for the extremities of life, but for its centre. It is experience that faith arises from the feeling of awe;

an awe not about the working of the Universe, but regarding the very Universe itself, into which the individual is thrown, as it were. Not the how, but the phenomenon called the Universe is the root mystery which compels and impels the individual to tread along the path of faith. In other words faith is the hope and attempt of man to co-operate with the 'whole being'. After all, man is only a junior partner in the mighty enterprise called 'the Universe'. As Karl Heim points out in the book, 'Christian Faith and Natural Science', "if we were to think of the millions of years of earthy history, as compressed within twentyfour hours, then, we would have to say that man has appeared on the scene only twenty two seconds before midnight". The Ecclesia holds the doctrine that faith is deepened as well as widened by the Sacraments. In Sacraments the divine presence is 'focused', because, the heart of every Sacrament is God's gift of Himself to the individual through His only begotten Son, the 'sacraficial lamb' and by the Spirit. The whole is, of course, a mystery that is at once overwhelming and fascinating.

## 12. 'Ex opere operato'

Mention must be made of yet another couple of theories which were put forth by theologians. In the first place, it is taken as axiomatic that Triune God is the principal cause, while the officiator is only the instrumental cause of God, for effecting Sacraments. St. Chrysostom wrote in his homily 2 on 2 Tim, "the priest's function is simply to open his mouth, and it is God who accomplishes what is done". He continues in a classic comment: "The eucharistic oblation remains the same, whether Paul or Peter offers it". It can be construed that the same would be the effect in baptism as well. Augustine also argued in the same line. He contended that a Sacrament will be valid whether Peter offered it or Judas offered it. To sum up, the Sacrament is not rendered invalid even if the minister administering is misfit. The second theory that was developed was on the operative factor or the link between the spiritual grace and the visible

sign. Two views emerged. A few Fathers concluded that it was the formula per se or itself, invoked by the agent which constitutes the link. Formula included 'actions' too besides the words uttered. So they developed the theory that the 'formula' is a vehicle of grace with saving power. Another view was that the Holy Ghost responds to the formula, descends upon the 'matter' and thus transforms it into Sacrament. Theodore of Mopsuestia, in his homily Cat: 16, seems to blend these two theories. He substantiates it by taking the case of the Eucharist. The net result of these two theories was the formulation of the theological doctrine on 'Sacraments' known as 'ex opere operato'. This expression was officially adopted by the Roman Church, in the Council of Trent. It may be summarised as follows. The grace conveyed through the 'sacraments' is absolutely the gift of God the merciful, without involving in any way the merit of the minister. There is a corollary. It is the result of the potency of God's words pronounced in the form of the sacramental formula. Thus Sacraments came to be treated as sacred signs which actually and automatically actualise the grace they signify. The Reformers argued that the Sacraments do not bring any result simply through the objective performance of the rites. They added that it is not like the inoculation doing the healing work. Precisely for this reason, Protestantism declared that a gross objectivism may degenerate into superstition. Quite true. So, Reformers insisted that faith of the recipient is a necessary condition for the efficacy of the Sacraments. Therefore, the Reformers in their 'Article of Religion', published in 1553, denounced this doctrine of 'ex opere operato'. The divergence between Rome and the Reformists seems to come forth from a flagrant misunderstanding or lack of appreciation of the other's perspective!. It is wrong to suppose that the Roman doctrine requires 'no faith' at all from the recipient. What Cardinal Bellarmine has expressed is to be quoted here. "Good will, faith and penitence are necessary in the adult communicant, not as the active cause of sacramental grace, nor as efficacy to the sacrament. These dispositions merely remove the obstacles which might hinder its efficacy".

Equally erroneous it is, to think that Protestantism proclaims Salvation as arising from faith alone, as if repudiating the efficacy of 'gospel-Sacraments'. Eventhough it does not subscribe itself to the Roman theory, what XXVII-3 of the 'Westminster Confession' specifies is a testimony to this stand. It says, "neither does the efficacy of a Sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit and the Words of Institution". Rightly interpreted, both the branches believe both in 'faith', the subjective aspect, and the objective factor, 'Sacraments'. The natural formula will be "while faith fortifies, sacrament sanctifies". This stand will be acceptable to the Orthodox fraternity as well. The reflection of a layman on this subtle theological distinction would be that while Reformers make 'faith' a condition precedent for the efficacy of the Sacraments, Rome upholds faith as a condition co-essential with the reception of Sacraments. It is contended so, because, Sacraments have significance only as the redeeming work of Christ on the faithful. Theologically expressed, Sacraments have an existential-ontological basis. Anyway in 1563, just after a decade of the denunciation of 'ex opere operato' the objection was withdrawn by Lutheranism. Those who know the working of human psyche would treat this development as quite an inevitable one, as they are aware that man is incorrigibly Sacrament-oriented

### 13. Sacraments are what Sacraments do

In the backdrop of the 'divine origin' theory of the Sacraments and because of the lack of a definition, the ecclesiological conclusion would be that Sacraments are what Sacraments do. This contention of course is not one clothed in mere verbosity, but buttressed by Biblical passages, patristic proclamations and practices of the pious people. What the Anglican theologian Owen C. Thomas suggests in his work 'Introduction to Theology', is reproduced here: "theology of sacraments is based on various

Christian doctrines, of God, Creation, Humanity, History and Church". Viewed from the full span of 'Salvation History', 'Sacraments' are its commemoration in such a way that what is signified is received by the community. Sacraments are explained as rites offering spiritual and sacred dimensions to events and vocations of life. By way of illustration, the Church pointed out, that matrimony is linked to a call to fidelity, holy orders to service to society, penance to peace efforts. Also, it was argued that Sacraments satisfy the basic but divergent psycho-physical human needs like, belonging, hope, health, healing, gregariousness and the insatiable craving for immortality. Naturally, as the wisest psychologist and psychiatrist would do, the 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic' 'Mother Church', categorised the Sacraments on the basis of their bearings on man's terrestrial and celestial lives. Thus, there are Sacraments for the beginning of life, for its middle and for its end; for those in the secular and spiritual ways. So, there are Sacraments of initiation, healing, service and immortality. Baptism and Chrism belong to the first group, Penance and Unction to the second list, Holy Orders and Matrimony to the category of service. Obviously the Eucharist is for effecting everlasting life and eternal felicity. To realise all these, one must break into from the visible to the invisible, from signs to the things signified and from the Sacraments to the mysteries, as the Ecclesial teachings elucidate. From the level of an ordinary believer, it may be suggested that Sacraments arouse curiosity and lead to enquiry. They clearly show that something more is meant by them than the eye sees and the ear hears. The rewarding result will be the fruition of faith, which is the foundation of Christian life. The Christian Fathers were no lotus eaters. They knew the systole and diastole of human 'heart' or of the 'mind', if that usage is permissible. Every aspect of human life is linked with a Sacrament and no aspect is left unsanctified and unsublimated by a Sacrament. Concisely, Church's Sacramental system spans the whole life of man. They provide appropriate means for realizing the divine presence in every situation of life. Moreover in

Sacraments, man gives his whole-hearted worship. To put it conversely, worship is consummated in Sacraments. Sacraments are the sign posts for man in his odyssey here and excursion hereafter. Sacraments can be referred to as stages on the "pilgrims' progress" along the path of faith. Herein lies the eschatological significance of the Sacraments. They are the pointers of the fulfilment of 'Salvation History'. Therefore, they are called the 'food for the wayfarers'. Quite naturally this is 'distributed' with the benediction to receive them in peace, as are emphatically pronounced and proclaimed in the Syrian Liturgical Texts and misals.

#### **14. Constitutive elements of the Sacraments**

A Sacrament has two constitutive elements. So construed, the 'Church Fathers' of the first three centuries. They did so, from certain NT passages. To name a few, Mt 26, Mt 28, Acts 6, Acts 8, Jas 5, 1 Tim 4. They called the two constituents 'objects' and 'prayers'. Obviously the former was material and the latter spiritual. Although 'prayer' is not an element in the material sense, it is treated here as a constitutive or 'element' or factor theologically. Water used in Baptism and the bread as well as the wine of the Eucharist are objects. 'Prayer' or the spiritual element sanctifies the 'objects'. In the Augustinian period, the two factors were named 'Word and the Element'. The former signified the spiritual formula while the latter denoted the materials used in the Sacraments. With the influence of Aquinas becoming very dominant, the Roman Church replaced these terms by two new technical ones. They are "matter and form". Here, one notices the influence of 'hylomorphism' and of the philosophy of Aristotle. 'Hylomorphism' is the theory that the primordial substance in the Universe is 'matter'. Aristotle in his theory had postulated that any visible substance contained both 'matter' and 'form'. In ordinary parlance, they are the 'material' with which things are made of and secondly the

'essence' which underlies the matter. When applied in Sacramental theology, 'matter', stands for the 'outward and visible sign', while 'form' signifies the inward and spiritual grace resulting from the formula. The analytical Aquinas effected such a distinction in all the Sacraments. A very important point is to be considered in this context. The 'matter' for each Sacrament as well as the 'symbols' or 'forms' are specified by the Church. They are not to be altered by the option of the officiator. Why so? The answer is that, Sacraments are rooted in 'Christ-events'. The Church did not 'choose' the symbols of water, oil, bread or wine on Her volition or choice or liking. They were 'chosen and given' by Christ Himself or in some cases through deep reflection on the mysteries by His successors, who were surcharged and surfeited by the Spirit. By way of explanation, it is to be asserted that the 'matter' and the 'symbols' are not arbitrary; they are intrinsic essentials for the particular function signified by the specified Sacrament. What William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury has said, is to be reproduced here. "The materials, act as the vehicle, the expression and instruments of the spiritual and not as its enemy". Rejection of this theory of the Church would result in schisms and heresies, undermining the notae of the Church. Church of England calls a Sacrament 'regular', if it is performed in accordance with the general rules laid down by competent authority for the due administration of the Sacraments. In Episcopal Churches this would refer to the constitution, canon and ecclesial instruction. Thus, regularity is a matter of Church discipline. Generally, the Roman, the Reform, the Orthodox and the Assyrian, hold as a doctrine that any Sacrament would be a valid one, when three conditions are fulfilled. They are 'proper' 'matter', 'form' and 'minister'. The proper minister condition is called the 'intention' of the minister. That implies that there must be bonafide intention on the minister to do what

the Church asks. True, it is a subjective condition. Yet it can be objectively assessed by what apparently appears and purports to be the Sacraments of the Church. Finally, a Sacrament can be adjudged efficacious in so far as it effects the purpose for which Jesus Christ instituted that Sacrament.

## CHAPTER V

# THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

### 1. **Baptism - 'A dominical Sacrament'**

The Sacrament of Baptism is the bed rock for building up the Christian life. It is from the Greek word 'Baptizein', meaning 'immersion', that the English term Baptism has originated. From the tone of the NT, it is to be deemed as a rite of initiation. As is well known, Jesus Himself was initiated into public ministry through baptism by John the Baptist. The Apostles were instructed by Jesus to baptise believers. After Peter's address on the day of Pentecost, baptising was the first overt act of the Apostles. Since the Sacrament has 'gospel' basis, Episcopal Churches as well as Congregational Assemblies acknowledge this as a 'dominical sacrament'; or as one instituted by Jesus Christ Himself. Yet, differences and divergences in the modality of administering baptism are seen among Churches. Adult Baptism was the norm in the beginning of Christianity. From the book captioned 'Early History of the Liturgy till the time of Gregory the Great' of Josef Jungmann, S.J, the following episodes can be incorporated. St. Augustine was baptised only at the age of 33 yrs; the deferring was due to his mother's insistence. John Chrysostom was baptised when he was 25; Basil at 26; Gregory of Nazianzus at 28, Ambrose at 34 when he was elected bishop. Constantine, the Emperor, did not get baptised until he was on his deathbed. From the 'Apostolic Tradition' of Hippolytus the details of a liturgy of baptism, without naming it so, has been obtained. A period of preparation, to gain entry into the

Christian way of life was prescribed in the early periods. Thus came into vogue the stage called catechumenate. During this period the would-be converts were instructed on Christian doctrines. A sponsor was also needed. By the 3rd century, baptism came to be linked with Easter and so became an annual ceremony. Chapter 7 of the 'Didache' paints a very simple picture of Baptism. It prescribes Baptism in water in the name of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The third century Syrian Church order known as 'Didascalia Apostolorum' requires deaconesses to be appointed, in order to carry out this ministry for women candidates. Almost at this time, infant baptism came into vogue. The sponsor became the guardian of the child's faith after Baptism. This development took place around the 5th century. It was pointed out by some scholars, that as infants could not fulfil the conditions of renouncing the evil, of repentance and of faith, they were ineligible to receive the grace through Baptism. Those in favour of infant Baptism argued that the initiated infant would grow in grace through the sacramental structure. On the authority of Mt. 8 and Mk. 2, they further held that the sponsors could fulfil all the necessary conditions and God would respond to the faith of the sponsors. Again, quoting Mk10, they asserted that God's love and grace are antecedent and absolute. These arguments do have substance. Christianity aims at transcending the disjunction between the subjective and objective aspects of existence. It is better that Christian life coincides with the beginning of life itself. Besides, it is to be pointed out that over-exaggerated individualism is the cause for the antipathy towards infant baptism. After all, Christian existence is ecclesial or corporate. Many a catechumen had to die before receiving baptism. So it was held that the sooner the 'incorporation' is effected, the better. Yet another change occurred around this time. When infant baptism became the order of the day, immersion in water was replaced by pouring of water on the head of the child. This was for expediency sake.

## 2. Theology of Baptism - 'Putting on Christ'

The 'two constituents' required in every Sacrament, namely 'matter' and 'form', are, in the case of Baptism, 'water' and 'washing' respectively. With regard to the effects of Baptism, preaching of St. Paul is to be dealt with at first. According to Pauline epistle to Gal 3:27 and Rom 13:14, Baptism is 'putting on Christ'. The obvious inference is that through Baptism, a person regains 'individuality'. That is, indivisible communion with the Triune God. It is the result of getting ingrafted to the Corpus of Christ. Further, Baptism provides the Christian certainty and protection of Christian life. In his 'Christian Doctrine' Dr. J.S. Whale narrates an anecdote which throws insight into this effect of Baptism. "When Luther was most afflicted with temptations and doubts, he would write two words on his table with a piece of chalk, 'baptizatus sum' meaning 'I have been baptised'. Luther meant that Baptism was the foundation of his Christian certainty. Baptism turns away an individual from the sinful ways to that of grace. To Theophilus of Antioch, Baptism represented remission of sins and regeneration in Christ. The dynamics is as follows. Separateness from the 'Being' is the basis of what is termed sin. This agonising attitude is annulled by Baptism, by gaining entry into the ecclesial existence and through it communion with Christ. Hence St. Paul says: "we are baptized into one body, the body of Christ". For St. Paul, immersion in the baptismal water and arising from it are symbols of dying and resurrecting with Christ, the Saviour. The imagery of 'putting on the garment' of the grace and spirit of Christ is a recurring one in the writings of Syrian Fathers, when dealing with Baptism. Further, the Fathers of Syrian systems relate Baptism with the 'Motherhood' of the Church. In the 'Hymns of Epiphany', St. Ephrem develops the idea of the 'baptismal font' as the uterus of the 'Mother Church'. In a similar manner S.J. Beggiani in his work 'Early Syrian Theology' extols the effect of Baptism: "As the womb of our mother Eve gave birth to mortal children subject to corruption, let this Baptism become a womb which will give birth to spiritual and immortal children". In the

Greek tradition, Didymus the Blind is considered as the first author who speaks of the 'baptismal font' as the perpetual virgin mother of the baptized. So opines the Oxford theologian, Sebastian Brock, in the 'Mysteries hidden in the side of Christ'. Again through Baptism, an individual gains a temporal identity. He or she is counted somebody in the body of Christ. This is the significance of giving a Christian name during Baptism. Awarding a title or name to some one or to something is equivalent to owning. The OT account of Adam giving names to beasts of the earth and birds of the blue signifies man's right over them. Another effect of Baptism is that it makes one a spouse of Jesus. Baptism is no mere formality or ritual. It enables one to receive grace in abundance and commits one to general ministry. In St. Augustine's 'Confessions' there is an interesting incident. An old Platonic philosopher by name Marius Victorinus is trying to induce a simple hearted bishop to consider him a Christian on account of his conviction, without requiring him to come to the Church to be baptized. Did walls, he asked, make Christians. The philosopher was made to understand that he could become a Christian only by being baptized in the Christian way. What Gregory of Nazianzus puts poetically cannot be but incorporated as it clarifies the all comprehensive effects of Baptism. "Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift. We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal and most precious gift. It is called gift because, it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace, since it is given to the guilty; baptism, because sin is buried in water; anointing, for it is priestly and royal; enlightenment, as it radiates light; clothing, since it veils our shame; bath, because it washes; and seal, as it is our guard and sign of God's Lordship". Really, Baptism begets benign beingness in beings of base metals and mean minds.

### **3. Sacrament of Chrism or Confirmation - Power to fight Temptation**

Chrism is the Sacrament that fortifies one with the Holy Spirit. It is true that the NT does not specifically say about Chrism or Chrismation as a Sacrament. But the gospel basis of this Sacrament can be inferred from passages like Jn 20:22, I Jn 2:20 and Acts 8:17. As in the Apostolic experience on the Pentecost, theologically there is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Chrism. About Chrism, Dr. J.N.D. Kelly observes in his 'Early Christian Doctrines', "it is a common place of patristic teaching that it betokens the baptised converts' admission to the kingship and priesthood of Messiah". He goes on to add, that for Cyril of Alexandria, "it signifies the 'perfecting' of those who have been justified through Christ in baptism". It was contended that when anointed with the holy oil or Chrism, the baptised receives from the Paraclete, the power to fight temptation. Besides, the recipient would become endowed with the 'seven gifts' of the Holy Spirit. They are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, meekness, piety and the love of the Lord. Precisely, which all graces are required for the full spiritual growth would flow from Chrismation. However, there are two views about the effect of this Sacrament. Some say that the presence of the Spirit is experienced only through this Sacrament. They have two supporting arguments from the NT for their theory. One is the story of the Samaritans as recorded in Acts 8:17. Though the Samaritans were baptised by Philip, the disciple, they were endowed with the Spirit only when Apostles Peter and John 'laid on' their hands on them. The other episode is the case of the Ephesians, who albiet were a baptised group, received the Holy Spirit only when St. Paul laid on his hands upon them. 'Laying on of hands' was deemed a symbolic act of Chrismation. The other view is that by administering Chrism, nothing special is added to the benefits already bestowed by Baptism. They argued that this Sacrament simply deepens or intensifies what has already been effected

through Baptism. Nonetheless, Chrismation makes the candidate a true witness to Christ. This appears to be the definite doctrine of the Orthodox Churches. On the authority of Jn. 20:22, Aquinas argued that this Sacrament can be construed to have been instituted by the 'historical' Jesus Himself. It is admitted that in the cited passage, what is stated is that Jesus 'breathed' on them. But when one comes to know, that according to the Church Fathers, besides air, there are various other symbols also such as dove, oil etc., to represent the Spirit, the implication of 'oil' or Chrism becomes intelligible. Also, the positiveness of the arguments of Aquinas becomes appreciable. Further, the ancients might have drawn inspiration to select 'oil' as a medium for heralding divine presence from the parable of the 'wise virgins' who had reserved 'oil' to light up their lanterns to receive the 'Bridegroom' with the warmest welcome. The 'anointing oil' here is the medium to 'light' the life of the candidate to receive the honourable heavenly guest, the Holy Spirit.

#### **4. Shift of emphasis in Chrismation**

Like Baptism, Chrismation also is not repeatable but administered only once in one's life-time. The 'matter' in this Sacrament is the 'anointing oil'. The 'form' is the 'formula' of the Bl. Trinity, invoked in Chrismation. It was explicated that while Baptism denotes birth in Christ, this Sacrament signifies growth in Spirit to be culminated in the communion with God the Father. Thus, the theology of this Sacrament is subject to the operation of 'Perichoresis'. A few conceptual developments on this Sacrament that have happened in the Roman Catholic Church have to be glossed over. If in the past, the emphasis was on the endowment of the 'seven gifts', today it is on the effect of making the baptised, true witness of Christ. This is certainly an approximation to the doctrine of the Orthodox Churches. Further, following the publication of the 'Rites for Christian Initiation of Adults', there is a reversion to the Orthodox tradition of unified celebration of Baptism and Chrismation. This is confirmed by the Catholic

priest Liam Kelly in his very recent book 'Sacraments Revisited'. According to the RCIA, "the conjunction of the two celebrations signifies the unity of Paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit". Vatican too, is not antipathetic to the 'joint administration' as is evident from the brief to the Syro-Malabar Rite of Kerala. In both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, Chrism is sanctified by the bishops. The priests administer it with the permission of the prelates.

## 5. Evolution of Chrismation

Originally, Chrismation was administered jointly with Baptism. Of course, there was no uniformity regarding the order of precedence in administration. According to the 'Acts of Thomas', an apocryphal text of antiquity, 'anointing' was followed by Baptism with water. J.D. Zizioulas, the theologian, in his 'Being as Communion' writes that while in Syria and Palestine, Chrismation preceded Baptism, in other places Baptism preceded Chrismation or Confirmation. This latter practice came to prevail everywhere, by the fourth century. Antiquarian Tertullian's account of around 200 AD, accords authoritativeness to the norm of 'joint administration'. He states, "then having come up from the font, we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction..... In the next place, his hand is laid on blessing, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit." In the East, 'anointing', rather than 'laying on of hands', was the essential feature. Catechism 21:1-3 of Cyril of Jerusalem substantiates this practice. He contends that just as Jesus received the Spirit in the form of a 'dove' after being baptised, so the 'oil' anointed on the baptized person, symbolises the sanctification by the Spirit. Here also, it may be recalled that like 'dove', 'oil', is also a symbol of Holy Spirit. In the West, 'laying on of hands' continues along with Chrismation as an important ingredient in initiation. In 416 A.D. Pope Innocent I introduced a distinction between 'baptism' and what was termed 'signing' with the 'oil' equivalent to Chrismation. While priests could baptize, 'signing' was reserved exclusively for the

bishops. Really this rite was one of 'consignation', as it involved only the stamping of the sign of the Cross on the forehead of the candidate. In due course, 'consignation' came to be called 'confirmation' because it 'confirmed' or as Serapion, the 4th century bishop of Thumis and contemporary of Athanasius says, 'strengthened' a candidate to fight for Christ. The term 'confirmation' was used for the first time at the French Council of Riez in 439. Confirmation was conducted when the candidate reached adulthood or attained the age of discrimination. The 'Holy See of Antioch' did not approve of the changes of Rome, on the ground that the original practice was 'joint administration' and that too in infancy. The doctrine of Confirmation at a later age is based on the assumption that re-affirmation of baptismal vows by a mature person would felicitate 'Christian witnessing'. William Durandus, who became bishop of Mende in France in 1285, changed the imposition of hands on each candidate to an extension of the hands over all the candidates assembled seeking Confirmation. He also introduced 'the slap on the cheek', along with Confirmation. This was a sign that in this 'Sacrament' the candidate received the strength to fight temptation. The council of Trent confirmed 'confirmation' in no ambiguous terms. Incidentally it is to be mentioned that, although many of the Protestant Churches have abolished 'confirmation', Church of England still retains it as a 'divine ordinance'. The general thinking of the Episcopal Churches is that Chrismation, with or without the laying on of hands, would bestow the Holy Spirit on the baptised.

#### **6. Sacrament of Confession or Reconciliation-Core of Christian Charity**

'Fire escape'! answered the priest to the curious enquiry of a gentleman about the confessional. May be, confession redeems one, who treads along the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire of the hell. But, is it the be all and end all of this Sacrament called Confession or Penance? No. Not at all. Much more. The mature wisdom that prompted the ancient prelates to prescribe this as a Sacrament is vouched in modern times by

psychology. Guilt conscience, this recent subject affirms, is the inevitable traumatic effect of unethical and immoral acts of man. Its sequel, suppression of guilt, generates many a psycho-somatic illness. The sooner this haunting guilt feeling is eliminated, the better for the sufferer. 'Mother Church', the wise diviner into the working of the mind of man and that of God too, prescribes the most effective remedy for this malady and that is the Sacrament of 'Confession'. In this Sacrament man admits, God acquits. To elucidate, the sinner repents for his or her faults and follies. God, the merciful replenishes that child of His by His abundant grace and limitless love. In short, by 'Confession' one wins back 'wholeness' of personality. No wonder, this marvellous Sacrament is the heart or core of 'Christian Charity', as enshrined in the Gospels. A sympathetic sentiment to sinners, suits best with the spirit of the Gospel. This is what is exemplified in the 'judgement' of Jesus of the 'sinner' Mary Magdelene. What a wonderful physician is Jesus, who prescribed repentance and explained the effect of the remedy through the parable of the prodigal son. Verily, when the created 'regrets', the Creator 'responds'. Syrian Fathers frequently speak of sin as a wound that requires healing. St. Ignatius of Antioch, in his letter to the Ephesians 7:2, the author of the 'Acts of Thomas' and St. Ephrem in his 'Hymn on Nativity' 13:2, hail Christ as the true physician and medicine of life. Aphrahat, in his 'Demonstrations' II: 92 explicates as follows. "Christ, the good doctor has transmitted His power to heal and forgive the sins to the Apostles and to the bishops and priests after them."

## 7. "Dominically Instituted"

The Ecclesia, as noted earlier, is the 'primordial' Sacrament of God's forgiveness. The Church, acting as the vicar of Christ, actualises forgiveness that flows from God to the really repentant through the Sacrament called Confession or Penance or 'Reconciliation' as it is sometimes referred to. The authority of the Church for this Sacrament is summarily sanctioned by the Founder through His utterances, as

recorded in Mt. 16:19 and Mt. 18:15-17. According to the Anglican Theologian, John Macquarrie, 'Confession' has as much claim to be called 'dominically' instituted, as baptism and Eucharist. It is on the basis of Jn. 20:23, that he makes this inference. This Sacrament is a spiritual reconciliation, firstly with the all loving and gracious God, Who in His paternal affection welcomes back the guilty and the gruesome and secondly with the Ecclesia. The 'Mother Church' in Her maternal love cleanses the confessed, of his or her iniquities and lapses. Thus men and women have a sigh of relief, when they receive the divine grace through this Sacrament of the Church. It is because, they are assured by the 'confessor' the Church, that no more would they have to live in the fear of eternal damnation or the scare of being crushed either here or hereafter under the juggernaut of their own actions; but rather inherit the Kingdom of God. Theologically, the effect of Confession is that sins and their imprints, if any, are completely wiped off. Therefore, one need not have to worry about the past 'sinful days and life', nor should guilt-consciousness possess the individual. An anecdote from His Excellency Cardinal Jaime Sin, the presiding Archbishop of Manila, Philippines, will elucidate this point. This is narrated by Rev. Dr. Kurian Mattom, the former Principal of the St. Thomas College, Palai, Kerala, in an article published some time ago, in the religious magazine 'Dukharono'. A lady who claimed to have frequent visions of Jesus, approached the archbishop and told him about her 'Christ-experience'. The archbishop told her that he would believe, only if she could tell him of certain of his 'secret misdeeds' that he had confided to his confessor. The lady replied that she would ascertain them from Jesus Himself, when He willed to grant her vision again. A few months passed by. The lady came running to the archbishop early one morning. The prelate politely asked her whether Jesus did divulge the 'secrets'. 'No!' The lady quietly replied. Hurriedly, however, she continued: "I asked Jesus persistently about it. He explained emphatically: 'when somebody confesses with a contrite heart, the sins and their effects are

completely wiped off from My mind, and once I forgive any sin I forget it for ever'. That was all". Naturally, this Sacrament can be administered as and when a candidate feels that he or she has sinned. In the Greek East, Gregory of Nyssa classified 'sins' into different categories like 'lesser' sins and 'major or capital' ones. There are three 'capital' sins, namely apostasy, adultery and murder. St. Basil's list is more comprehensive. In the Latin West, Aquinas introduced two categories of sins. They are termed 'mortal or deadly' and 'venial'. This latter, does not turn away a sinner completely from God. To illustrate, they are like loitering without losing the way. In the Sacrament of 'Confession' the 'matter' element is 'Penance' while the 'form' factor is the 'absolution' by the officiator. There are three stages in this Sacrament. The first is a genuine sorrow for the sins committed. Technically it is called contrition. Secondly, there must be a confession of sins. It behoves the believers to draw nigh unto the priests with great confidence and to reveal all sins to them. Finally, there is conversion. It is the determination to 'sin no more'.

## **8. Evolution of the Sacrament of Confession**

The early Christians believed that the result from 'Confession' was reconciliation with the Ecclesial community as such. In fact, this thinking is what we glean from St. Paul's Epistle to Corinthians. Letter of St. James, written between A.D. 50-57, gives a vivid account of the part played by the community in the Sacrament of Confession. In the 'Didache' or 'Teaching of the Twelve Apostles', public confession of sin is prescribed. However, by the 3rd century the role of the clergy began to be significant. It was mainly because pastoral considerations were making the observance of old practices difficult. Yet, public confession was continued. By the sixth century, monks developed the system of confessing lapses in monastic vows and 'sins' to a 'soul friend'. During their visits to villages and rural regions they began to hear confession of the people privately. Penances of varying types were prescribed by these monks. They were

not fixed arbitrarily. But they were in accordance with the penitential manuals and tariff codes that were developed during this period, both by the East and West. Eventually, tariffs were replaced by prayers. Also at this time, parish priests began to hear individual confessions. Thus came into practice private or auricular Confession, followed in the Roman and Orthodox traditions. The IVth Lateran Council of the Roman Church made annual confession an official Sacrament. By convention, it had become so, among the Syrian sections of Christianity.

### **9. Sacrament of Priesthood - Manifestation of the 'notae' Apostolicity**

"Tend my sheep" commanded the resurrected Christ to Peter, the Apostle. The 'why' and 'how' aspects of the Ecclesia, are summarised in this simple but dictating 'dominical' directive. For a better appreciation of this contention and its content, a few Gospel events and their implications are to be borne in mind. The first of which is, that though Jesus had founded the earthly Ecclesia as part of His public ministry itself, He did not disclose the purpose then and there. Jesus, in His wisdom deferred the disclosure as if awaiting the "fullness of time". When the risen Lord felt that the 'hour' had come, He commanded to 'tend and feed' His 'lambs' and 'sheep', as is recorded in Jn. 21:16-18; thereby, Jesus furnished the rationale for the Ecclesia. The second fact to be remembered is the implication of the imagery of 'sheep tending', as it expounds the 'how' aspect of the Ecclesial functioning. A shepherd's complete concern is the safety of each sheep, from attacks of animals, ailments, and the like. Obviously, there must be a strong and safe hold. This should be well guarded at all times, climes and sides. The sheep must be fed properly and tended promptly. Also, they must be rescued from the ravines into which they have fallen. They must be led to green pastures and still waters. Services of many personnel, with varied talents and training are essential and unavoidable. The Ecclesial hierarchy provides all these requirements

to the offsprings of the 'sheep and lambs', that Christ entrusted with Simon Peter. The third fact is, that Christ's commands at the close of the Gospel of Matthew are indicative of the multifarious functions that the Apostolic College would have to undertake. Besides baptising and preaching Jesus had implied other functions in the ministry. For, the ministry or vocation that Jesus handed over to Peter and the Apostles, was one to be performed in perpetuity until the Parousia. Further, it would not spare any part of the world either. Quite naturally problems and solutions concerning control, gradation and delegation of authority were all inherent in the words 'tend and feed'. The logical outcome was the Ecclesial hierarchy. In other words, it originated due to the exercise or execution of a decree of Christ to Peter. Finally, the ringing words of Jesus, that His mission was to fulfil and not to destroy, afford ample justification for the Ecclesial institution and orders. Hierarchy was an integral part of the Jewish religion. More than once did Jesus submit Himself to Jewish canons. Never did He denigrate the system, despite His devastating denunciation of the rigid, relentless and remorseless interpretation of the 'Law' by the scribes and sacerdotal supremos. Considering all this, it can be authoritatively asserted that the hierarchical structure was inlaid in the 'dominical design' of the founding of the Ecclesia. Of course, it became manifested only when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and directed them, to 'lay their hands' on the other 'selected souls'. The 'matter' in this Sacrament is the 'laying on' of hands, while the 'form' is the prayer for 'grace'. The 'Holy Orders', is nothing less than the manifestation of Apostolicity, which is an integral 'aspect' of the Ecclesia.

### **10. Evolution of 'Holy Orders'**

Imbibing the spirit and significance of the words and works of the Master, as well as the then prevailing pattern of the synagogues, the Apostles appointed 'Presbyters' in local churches. It was by 'laying on' of hands on a 'few selected', and invoking the grace of the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in Acts 6 and Tim 4:27. 'Presbyter' is derived from the Greek

word 'Presbyteroi', meaning 'elder'. They were to supervise the community. Although the word 'priest' is derived from 'Presbyteroi' the term 'priest' is the translation of the Greek word 'hiereus'. The Primitive Church used the word 'priest' in the first place to Christ. Ecclesiologically, He is verily the Priest and the High Priest eternal. In certain communities, 'elders' began to preside over the communal conventions. They were called by the Greek term 'episkopos', meaning bishops. In due course, the 'episkopos' began to preside over the 'thanksgiving service' called the 'Eucharistic' celebration and instruct the catechumens, besides overseeing and general administration. The function of the bishops and elders overlapped in a few communities. This is evident in Acts 20 and 1 Pet 5. Another set of ministers, called 'diakonoi', the Greek term for 'deacon', was also prevalent. The prototype of this ministry is found in that of Stephen and his companions as seen in Acts 6:1-6, despite they were not really called deacons. The 'deacons' assisted the bishops both in their liturgical and administrative functions. Unlike the bishops and the deacons, the presbyters did not have full-time ministry. Other than this general picture nothing more specific can be gathered from the NT accounts. In the formative period, many an outward structural change must have taken place. By the beginning of the 2nd century, however, the three - tiered ministry emerged. This was not on the basis of difference in the 'grace' of priesthood, but on the basis of authority and hierarchy. Accordingly, there was one bishop for each town, a presbyter for each local church. The deacon assisted the bishop. This threefold distinction was flexible. Both in the West and the East, there were minor orders like sub-deacons, lectors, acolytes, porters etc. In this context, two observations are worth noting. As per the Syrian tradition, the NT priesthood has a direct link with that of Moses and Aaron, Yahweh's own choices. As a sequel, in one of the West Syriac hymns, priesthood is extolled as being honoured both on earth and in heaven alike, while kingship is described as honoured only in this world. The second one is

the dictum of Ignatius of Antioch, that wherever the bishop be, there is the 'Catholic' Church. He held that the role of the bishops is essential for preserving doctrinal unity. A bishop can command the obedience of the community. His aim should not be subjection but fellowship, as Acts 15, 1 Cor 5 and 2 Cor 2 specify. Precisely, the bishop needs the intercession, consolation and co-operation of the community. In the 'Apostolic Tradition' of Hippolytus, there is a clear description of the rite of ordination. With this rite coming into common usage, there came up a distinction in status between the clergy and the laity. The former was deemed 'sacred and holy', while the latter, secular and profane. It was Cyprian, who referred the Presbyters by the term 'priests', as they began to celebrate the Eucharist as a sacrifice. A side effect to these developments during the 3rd century, was that while the liturgical role of the bishops and the priests became well pronounced, that of the deacon turned out to be insignificant. It came to be considered as a step to priesthood. By about the 6th century, the bishops began to exercise certain executive and judicial functions in civil administration, due to a combination of circumstances. Consequently, they started to put on the gowns and garments of such civil and judicial officials and also wear their insignias. Besides, theological and ecclesiological writings like those of Chrysostom and St. Augustine established the 'Holy Orders' on sound footing. 'His will' is fulfilled in His Ecclesia.

### **11. A ministry of Word and Sacrament - Ontological Dimension**

This Sacrament is directly 'for' and 'to' the Ecclesia. It has a special significance within the Sacramental structure as a whole. This is because, it confers spiritual authority and grace for the ministration of all other Sacraments. Rev. Sr. Dr. Sophy Rose, explicates: "It is the priests who impart the royal priesthood, through administering baptism to the faithful. They celebrate the Eucharist, the Sacrament of reconciliation. In other words, although ministerial priesthood is from the Church, without this,

the Church cannot exist.... Hence, there is basic complementarity between the nature of the Church and priestly vocation". Therefore, it is to be pronounced that the Ecclesia and this Sacrament of 'Holy Orders' are equally primordial. For the Church, Christ is the 'High Priest'. Priesthood is the insignia of both Christ and the Church. 'Ministerial Priesthood', as distinct from the 'royal priesthood' which is conferred on all by Baptism, is a sacramental gift of God to a few 'called' or 'selected' for public ministry. Even Jesus, submitted Himself to this Sacrament for receiving grace. Opinion is of course divided, whether it was from John the Baptist or from the old priest Simeon of the Temple that He obtained it. Calvin points out, citing Acts 3:23, that St. Paul also had the 'hands laid' upon him. It is a ministry of both Word and Sacraments. By the former the faith of the Ecclesia is edified, fortified, expressed and communicated, along with the proclamation of peace. The latter, namely, the Sacraments, are concisely for the 'safety of the souls'. While the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches stress on the Sacramental aspects, Protestantism emphasises on the Preaching function. It can be seen without much difficulty that ministerial priesthood is a safeguard from free lance public ministry. Special ministry checks the unwholesome and unholy system of the 'blind leading the blind'. As Owen C. Thomas, the Protestant theologian points out in the book, 'Introduction to Theology', even Luther maintained that a special ministry is essential to the well being of the Church, without involving any theological distinction of status between the priests and the laity. The authority of the Christian Gospel and ministry are not established by majority vote. For the Christian ministry, there is an ontological dimension. It is technically called 'character'. This is the development of an 'inner calling' or 'vocation' through ecclesial discipline. 'Ordination' to any particular order is given only once. Its vows are to be renewed from time to time. It cannot be denied that in the NT, several kinds of ministry with different degrees of fullness are recognized. Some of them are of

greater authority than others. As Erns Kasemaan suggests in the essay 'Ministry and Community in the new Testament', even St. Paul recognizes not nominal differences of function only, but real gradation in 'order' and authority. One wonders at his comment, 'Equality is not for Paul, a principle of Church Order'. What Jesus condemns is the 'seeking' of power and pre-eminence. With this taboo, He commissioned the Apostles to be His ambassadors and plenipotentiaries with power of transmission to those found fit. Equally what Peter deprecated was 'simony', the purchase of Ecclesial office by money. This is what is condemned in the story of Simon Magus, as recorded in the 'Acts' 8.

## **12. Neither light nor meal but the 'apostolical office'**

It is not only in the exhortations of the early Fathers like Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome, but in the writings of the revolutionary reformer Calvin also, that the absolute necessity of 'ordained' and 'ordered' ministry is seen. What John Macquarrie observes is worth recording. "One could hardly find a stronger or more persuasive statement than the one given by Calvin. He calls the ministers Christ's substitutes". Calvin writes in the 'Institute of Christian Religion IV iii. 170', "neither are the light and heat of the sun, nor meal and drink, so necessary to sustain and cherish the present life, as is the apostolical and pastoral office to preserve a Church in the earth".

## **13. The Sacrament of Eucharist-'Prior to the New Testament'**

"The 'Last Supper' of Lord Jesus was the first Eucharist", observes Rev. Liam Kelly. Since then, through thick and thin the Church has zealously carried out Christ's command to the Apostles, "Do this, in remembrance of me". St. Luke's Gospel 22:21 and St. Paul's 1st Ep. to Cor. 11:25, record these 'Words of Institution'. But, it is well to remember that, even before a single word of Paul's epistle or Gospels was written,

the Sacrament of Eucharist had come to be ceremoniously observed by the Christian community. Therefore, it is antecedent or prior to the NT. Yet there should not be any misunderstanding that the Christians simply took over the sacrificial rite of the then prevailing Qumran or Essene sects. The Liturgical scholar Stegemann Hartmut poignantly points out, "there can be no question of the Eucharist having been celebrated at Qumran or of the Christians having taken it over from the Essenes". This is taken from his work 'The Library of Qumran'.

#### **14. 'Sacrament of Sacraments'**

If this Sacrament is the concluding event of Christ's public ministry, it is the inauguration of the public function of the Ecclesia. Through this Sacrament, the 'Preached Word' reaches its culmination. In other words, 'action' adds authenticity and provides ineffability to utterances. The Eucharist is evidently the primary Sacrament of the Primordial Sacrament, the Ecclesia. Naturally, the Church hails it, the 'Sacrament of the Sacraments' or the paradigm of all Sacraments. For, it is the Sacrament revealed by the Father, through the voice of the OT Prophet Malachi, incorporated by the Incarnate Son through the 'Words of Institution' and enlivened by the life-giving Spirit through His descent upon It in response to the invocation of the vicar of Christ. As for the Church, She draws Her vital energy through the 'grace' bestowed on this Sacrament by the Triune God. Assuredly, it is the abiding vitality in the life of the Ecclesia. As the Church received the Sacrament from the Lord, She bequeaths it as a hallowed treasure, to every succeeding generation for celebration and revitalisation.

#### **15. Different names - Eucharist as Thanksgiving**

The different names attributed to this Sacrament reflect the richness of it. To substantiate, the following facts may be glossed over. Initially it was celebrated as a ceremony of gratitude for what Jesus endured for mankind. Hence, the Apostles and the primitive Christians christened it in

Greek, the 'Eucharist', denoting 'thanksgiving'. Even today the Christian Church has not given up this 'type' of thinking. In the Greek speaking East, the great prayer of 'thanksgiving' at the altar is called 'anaphora', which means offering or 'thing carried up' in sacrifice. In Roman use, the bread and wine set out for the thanksgiving are known 'oblata'. Its equivalent in Syrian usage contains many meanings. Offerings, Sacrifice, Prayer for the holy Qurbana or Mass are some of them. Besides being a thanksgiving, Eucharist is precisely a praise too. So far as the Church is concerned the connotation of the term, brings in a plethora of overtones. It is not a mere memorial of the words and acts of Jesus, who was entombed corporally centuries ago. The words 'do this' are deemed to be surcharged with sacrificial significance. This certainly is the conclusion from the contention of St. Paul. In fact, he sends out an awe-inspiring warning, when he forbids the unworthy from receiving the Eucharist, which is 'a spiritual banquet'. Conceded, that the Christians bring to their mind, in this Sacrament, all that transpired when Jesus lived. Nonetheless they are not the central points of the Eucharist. It is mainly a 're-enacting and a renewal' in the present, of the 'Christ-events'. The essential element in the Eucharist is not man's remembrance but commemoration of Christ's death and resurrection as found in I Cor:11. The Eucharist has an eschatological dimension too. So, the Parousia is extolled with steadfast hope and assured anticipation. In the 'Time Scale' the Eucharist unifies the past, present and the future. Differently put it is not a perfunctory giving of gratitude to a past event. It is rather, participation in 'grace-continuum' in the 'space-time continuum'. The result is that the sinner becomes sanctified and purified. St. Ephrem makes use of the imagery of the burning coal, to refer to the Eucharist. Obviously it is taken from the vision of the great prophet Isaiah. Though touched by the red hot coal, Isaiah's lips did not burn, rather he himself became purified and sanctified. Again, blessed with the 'gift of the inner eye' from the Eucharist, the mortal

receives replies to the riddles of birth and death. Verily, death is dissolved and immortality is brought before the eyes of the humans, in the 'Eucharistic Sacrament'. This is the grand vision on the Eucharist, which all the saints have sung in ecstasy. The life of 'God's people' in the generations gone-by, and yet to come are spiritually integrated into one whole union, firstly with the life of the living generation and then as a communion with Christ. Proudly therefore, Ignatius of Antioch eulogises Eucharist as a 'bond' among Christians and a link with Christ. To St. Ephrem, Eucharist is the 'medicine for immortality'. St. Thomas A' Kempis extols Eucharist as the grace that restores strength for the soul.

### **16. Eucharist as 'Holy Communion'**

More often than not, this Sacrament is hailed the 'Holy Communion'. Originally, it was a simple informal meal 'among the community of believers'. Still, right from the very beginning it was distinct from the 'agape' or love-feast, prevailing among certain other organisations and communities. The answer to the question how, is provided by the following contention. The 'bread and wine', the essential elements in the communal meal of Christians came to be regarded as 'holy', 'spiritual sustenance'. The real reason for this belief is that Jesus Himself is the fountain-head of this tradition of offering bread and wine, in perfect fulfilment of the pronouncement in prophet 'Malachi' 1:10. St. Paul has dwelt on this theme at length in one of his epistles. It is common knowledge that the original characteristics or sometimes acquired attributes of a thing, determines its nature. May be on the basis of this maxim, the 'Didache', the oldest extant liturgy of the Church, declares, "To us, thou has given spiritual food and drink through thy servant". The narration of the Most Rev. Sheehan in his book, 'The Sacrifice of the Mass' is quite fascinating. "The 'Bread' of the 'Last Supper' was indicated in the very name of the town where Christ was born. Bethlehem means the House or Home of Bread. The 'Wine' of the 'Last Supper' was spoken of by the ancient Jewish Patriarch Jacob.

On his death bed, he delivered the sublimest message to his son Judah".... that from him would be descended the Messiah who would wash his robe in 'wine' and his garment in the blood of the grape". The basis of Sheehan's surmise is found in Gen. 49:8-11. Reference must also be made to what Dr. J.S. Whale brings out through a lecture 'that he delivered at the Cambridge University, during the Michaelmas of 1940. He opines that mankind has attempted more than once to alter the 'constitutive elements' of the Eucharist. In support, he says that the evidences of the catacombs suggest that the Eucharist of the early Church was celebrated with fish, perhaps as a thanksgiving of Christ's feeding of the five thousand. The Kollyridians, a Christian community of the fourth century, used something like cheese-cakes. Much later, a Protestant sect, called Mennonites in Frisia, a part of Germany, practised mutual feet-washing, as celebration of the Eucharist, in deference to the writ of Jesus as recorded in the moving words of St. John's Gospel 13. A heretical sect, used 'aqua' or water instead of wine, and thus they earned the nickname 'Aquarians'. Yet, Dr. Whale correctly concludes that 'bread and wine' 'the original elements are what which are used by the Church, even today. No doubt, the more the things change the more they remain the same. When these elements receive the grace of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration, they are no longer 'bread and wine'. Apparently they remain so, but in reality, they have become 'heavenly' 'Bread and Wine'. In other words, by some 'mystery' of the Eucharist, they turn out into the 'body and blood' of Christ, the Saviour. To put it precisely, the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist eclipsed the concept of Eucharist as a communal meal and established It as the 'holy communion'. At this juncture, it is to be recalled that the exaggerated stress in the Roman Catholic Church, on the social aspect of the Eucharist is corrected by the Encyclical 'Mysterium fideii', promulgated in 1965, by Pope Paul VI.

## 17. Eucharist as Sacrifice

By the close of the 1st century, if not earlier, Christians began to revere the Eucharist as a Sacrifice and Feast of the Saviour Jesus. It was hailed, 'hallowed, mysterious and unique', because, Jesus Himself was the Sacrificer and the Sacrifice, or the giver of the Feast and the Feast itself. The 'Didache', the earliest document of the 'Teachings of the Lord through the twelve Apostles', applies the appellation 'sacrifice' to the 'Eucharist'. Ancient Fathers like Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, Justin the Martyr, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Irenaeus, etc. considered Eucharist to be a sacred sacrifice. The observation of Marcel Metzger, in the Book 'History of the Liturgy' is worth quoting. "The oldest description of the Eucharistic celebration is in the 'First Apology' of St. Justin". From the 'Apologia', that Justin sent to the then Roman Emperor, about A.D. 200, the following points can be picked. In the sacrificial service of the Eucharist, there were Bible readings, Offertory, Liturgy and Communion. 'Apostolic Tradition' of Hippolytus contains the earliest elaborate Eucharistic prayer, now extant. By the 3rd century, the ritualistic and sacrificial aspect became more formalistic. This was given official confirmation, with emperor Theodosius making Christianity the state religion. Another significant development also took place almost at this time. Eucharistic sacrifice became what is called, 'Leitourgia' in Greek, signifying a service in the name of or on behalf of the people. 'Liturgy' was celebrated by bishops and priests. The congregation, attended and watched rather than 'participated'. 'Seeing' the sacrifice silently till the words of dismissal in Latin, 'Ite missa est', were announced, became the norm. The word 'Mass' that is used to signify the Eucharistic sacrifice, is actually formed from the above quoted phrase. About the year 500 A.D, King Gundolald of Burgandy asked in a letter to Bishop Avitus of Vienna as to the meaning of the phrase. The Bishop replied that it was a common usage in the courts and cathedrals and it meant "go, the congregation is dismissed". Feeling of

fright and fear were instilled by the declarations of Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom. While the former spoke of the 'presence of Jesus' in the Eucharist 'as the most terrifying hour' the latter depicted the 'table of sacrifice', as a place of 'terror and shuddering'. Cyprian expatiates on the 'terrifying consequences' of desecrating the Sacrament. The hymns of Ephrem and the misals written by many Church Fathers too, had this effect on the minds of the congregations. For Irenaeus, the Eucharist is the 'new oblation of the new covenant' which the Ecclesia was privileged to receive through the Apostles, and subsequently offer to God. A superstition that after 'seeing the Eucharist, a person would not die on that day', also chanced to crop up in the minds of men. Perhaps, the fall out of too much of awe! An interesting episode is narrated by Rev. Fr. Liam Kelly, in the article 'Story of the Mass'. Back-benchers who could not 'see' the celebration, used to shout to the officiating priest 'Higher, Sir, Higher'.

### **18. Structure of the Eucharist**

The Eucharist is said to consist of two parts, the Offertory and the Oblation. This feature has historic roots. Offertory denoted the bread and wine, that the people used to bring to the church in the early periods as offerings. Or better, they may be styled symbols of their 'lives'. They were treated as 'life-symbols' because, the bread made of wheat, was the staple food and wine extracted from grapes was the main drink. Together they sustained human life. The congregation used to 'offer', these, in response to hearing the 'glad' news or the 'gospel' as it was called, or the 'Evangelion' as referred to by the Greek term. The priest then took these 'symbols of lives' to the sanctum, offered them at the altar, to be incorporated in the body of Christ, Who was supposed to be present mystically. The priest here 'acts' as Christ, who invites every one to His Table, where He is the host of the Feast as well as the Feast itself. The priest now performed the

second part of the Eucharist, namely Oblation. The core of the Oblation is the 'breaking of the bread' or the 'fraction ceremony' as it is called in Liturgical language. Christ is made known to the congregation through 'fraction ceremony' and distributing Him in 'Holy Communion'. The whole 'act', thus viewed, gets a new dimension. The congregation, as part and parcel of the Ecclesia, which is the mystical body of Christ, is joined to the head, Christ Himself through the 'offerings'. Christ and the congregation, together then perform the Sacrifice. The congregation thus 'participates' in the sacrificial act. The entire act becomes a 'holy Oblation of the whole Church'. Christ intercedes as the priest, and receives the Oblation as King and Lord. This is the mystery of the Eucharist. The description by Gregory Dix, the great authority on Liturgy, in his classical work, 'The Shape of the Liturgy' is to be incorporated here. He says that originally the celebration of the Eucharist comprised of a scheme of seven different actions. "At the Last Supper, our Lord took bread; gave thanks over it; broke it, distributed it; He took a cup of wine, gave thanks over it; and handed it to His disciples". Dix continues, "the liturgical tradition reduced these seven actions to four; the offertory, bread and wine are taken together and together are placed on the altar; prayer of thanksgiving, the presiding official gives 'thanks' to God over bread and wine together; the fraction, the bread is broken; and the communion, bread and wine are distributed together".

## 19. Theories on Eucharist

Theologians of early period brought out a few theories on Eucharist. In surveying the most important of them, one should not become oblivious to the fact that, 'Eucharist' is beyond logical analysis as it is essentially a 'mystery'. It will ever remain a mystery, even to the heavenly hosts. It must be admitted that underlying these divergent theories and hotly debated arguments, there is the insatiable alertness and alacrity to 'arrive' at the truth. This deserves appreciation. All the theologians agree that in the

Eucharist, 'bread and wine' constitute the 'form' while 'words of institution' make the 'matter'. Similarly, there is unanimity that, this is a repeatable Sacrament. Another point of general agreement is that, the 'elements' in the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ, as a result of Eucharistic celebration. There are differences in interpretations. One view is known the 'figurative' or 'symbolic' or 'allegoric'. The other is called 'realistic' or 'conversion' theory.

## **20. Symbolic theory**

This theory stressed the distinction between the visible elements and the reality they represented. On the authority of Dr. J.N.D. Kelly, it may be mentioned that, documents like 'The Apostolic Constitutions', 'Serapion's Liturgy', writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, and works of Eusebius of Caesarea, Eusthathius of Antioch, Macarius of Egypt, Athanasius of Nicene fame, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine, all upheld this theory. As a representation, the observations of Ambrose and Augustine may be summarily stated. St. Ambrose asserts that in the Eucharist, what is perceived after consecration is only a 'sign' of what is actually there. In Augustinian analysis, there is the bodily form that is 'seen' and the 'spiritual fruit' that is tasted by 'faith'. It should not be forgotten that the 'symbolic' theologians never denied the 'change' in the elements. They only emphasised that the 'change' is not physical, but to be apprehended by 'the eye of faith' alone, or to be understood in the 'spiritual' sense only.

## **21. Conversion theory**

What is called 'conversion' theory began to gain ground both in the Latin West and Greek East, since the time of its exposition by Cyril of Jerusalem. In fact, Cyril of Jerusalem is regarded as the pioneer of Conversion theory. Briefly, his argument is as follows. As a result of the invocation or epiclesis, the Holy Spirit descends upon the 'elements' and 'converts' or 'changes' them into the 'body and blood' of Christ. Gregory of

Nyssa took up this doctrine. He contended that the nature of the visible objects are 'transelemented' and acquired the form of Christ's 'body and blood'. Gregory of Nazianzus seems to have changed his earlier 'symbolic' stance. Chrysostom speaks of "eating Christ, even of burying one's teeth, in His flesh. The wine in the chalice is identically that which flowed from His pierced side". In parenthesis, it may be pointed out that Philexinus of Maboog, the Syrian Orthodox saintly prelate of later period, echoes the remarks of Chrysostom, about the wine in the cup. In a letter, he writes: "There came forth blood and water, baptismal water, together with the blood that brings absolution; by water the font was indicated; by blood the holy mysteries which cleanse us from sin, every time we receive them". It may be a poetic presentation, because the Syrian Orthodox Church does not accept the 'Conversion' theory as such. For Chrysostom, the elements are 'refashioned' or 'transformed'. The Alexandrian and the Antiochian schools accepted the 'conversion' theory by the 5th century. Theodore of Mopsuestia argued, that at the 'Last Supper' Jesus never used the word 'symbol', but explicitly expressed "this is my body and blood". The logical soundness of this argument may force a layman like the present author to reflect as follows. If water blushed and became wine when it saw its Lord at Cana, could not such a miracle take place at the 'words' of Lord Jesus at the 'Last Supper'. Nestorius too, nodded to the 'Conversion' stand. A few monophysites also subscribed themselves to this theory and held that after the epiclesis the elements became different 'substances'. The moderate Antiochian, Theoderet, reacted against them. He held that there was no 'transformation of substance'. They are to be deemed as 'made', or 'changed' into the 'vehicle of divine grace'. This is a 'spiritualistic' interpretation and it amplifies the 'mystery' of the Eucharist. The Antiochian Church seems to have held on to this theory, ever since. In the West also, 'conversion' theory began to exert its influence to such an extent that

even Ambrose and Augustine, who both were originally supporters of the 'symbolic' theory, became 'converts' to 'conversion' theory, as pointed out by Dr. J.N.D. Kelly. It is another matter that Augustine's thought passes from Christ's 'Sacramental' to 'His mystical body'. Dr. Kelly's following observation also is very worth remembering. He continues that, if any Western theologian of this time has treated the elements as 'symbols', there is a reason for it. It was because they affirmed that there existed an inexplicable or mysterious relation between the 'symbol' and the 'things symbolised'. So, Dr. Kelly contends that the West adopted the 'realistic' or the 'conversion' dogma. A natural question arose, regarding the 'cause' of conversion. Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa in the East and Ambrose in the West held that it lay in the priest's invocation of the 'words of institution'. Serapion, in his Liturgy and Cyril of Jerusalem in his lectures argued that the transformation is due to the descent of the Paraclete. Theodore of Mopsuestia seems to have combined these two views. The Syriac Orient by and large agreed to Theoderet's theory. By the 7th century, the celebration of the Eucharist became rigid and uniform throughout the Christian world. The main question that engaged the theologians of this time was, as to how did the bread and wine get transformed into the 'body and blood' of Christ.

## **22. Transubstantiation theory**

The answer to the above question is the doctrine of transubstantiation. In fact, the conversion theory of the old, paved the way for this theory. The term 'transubstantiation' was employed for the first time by Archbishop Hilderbert of Toure, France in the 11th century. A century later, Pope Innocent III referred to this term in a letter to the Archbishop of Lyons. The Scholastic theologians explain the theory very subtly. They introduced the concepts of 'substance' and 'accidents' as a premise of the doctrine. The former signifies the underlying and unchanging reality of a thing; the latter, namely accidents, are the qualities like colour, smell etc. After

consecration, 'reality' changes, 'accidents' remain the same. Aquinas held that this 'change' takes place, at the conclusion of the consecration, 'automatically' and independently of the merit of the officiator. This theory is known as 'ex opere operato'. In 1215, the 'Lateran Council' used it in a Church document. Since then, it has remained the official doctrine of the Roman Church, inspite of explicit challenges from Protestants and suppressed sentiments from Syrian circles. Here it must be noted that in Protestantism, there is no uniform theory on the Eucharist. Luther did believe in the 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist. He explained it using the term 'consubstantiation' instead of 'transubstantiation'. According to this theory, after consecration the 'presence' of Christ's body and blood would 'co-exist' in the 'bread and wine'. Calvin upheld the 'symbolic' theory. For him, 'bread and wine' are 'signs' of the 'body and blood' of Christ. In Anglicanism, there are three views on Eucharist. One upholds that there is 'real presence' of Christ, as a result of either transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Archbishop Temple of Canterbury's comment is worth citing. He opines that if 'substance' is defined as 'value', transubstantiation is made more acceptable; otherwise, consubstantiation is exactly correct. The second stand is called 'Receptionism'. It states that the 'presence' of Christ is in the heart of the recipient. The third one is termed 'Virtualism'. It is the dogma that the Eucharist is Christ's body and blood not in 'substance' but in 'spiritual power'. The Council of Trent that was held by the Roman Church during 1545 to 1563, to 'set off' the influences of Protestantism, affirmed 'transubstantiation'. It thus became a bench-mark in the doctrine of Eucharist. The conclusions of the Trent Council were made more specific with the publication in 1570 of the Roman Missal, which remained unchanged till Vatican II. With a view to facilitate greater participation of the 'community of believers' in the Eucharistic Sacrament, 'vernacular' Mass is presently allowed by Vatican. Moreover, it acknowledges that the Eucharist is not an end in itself, but a stimulus to

action in faith. Reference must be made to a line of 'thinking' among a few Catholic theologians, on the 'conversion' aspect of the Eucharist. It is designated 'transfiguration' or 'transignification'. It states that, after epiclesis, the elements assume a 'new mode' of existence. But 'transubstantiation' is still the official dogma of the Roman Church. So far as the Syrian Orthodox Church is concerned, there is no 'official' dogma about the change of the elements, although the Church firmly believes that the 'bread and wine' do become the 'body and blood' of Christ through some mystery. The following anecdote will throw much light on this. When Gregorius of Parumala, Bishop of Niranam diocese, Kerala, who was canonised in 1948 by the Orthodox Church, was laid up with some fatal gastric ailment, he was medically advised to take wine. St. Gregorius replied that on account of his monastic vows he could not consume any drink that was heady. 'Your Grace, what is that you drink in the Eucharist', asked somebody who was attending on him. Pat came the reply. 'After the mass, what I consume is not wine, but the blood of my Saviour, Lord Christ.'

### **23. Eucharist - Sacrament of 'Corpus Christi'**

It is quite astounding that despite the doctrinal controversies and external influences, a basic pattern has persisted in this 'Supreme Sacrament' all throughout the ages. Certain words and actions in the Eucharist are universal among Episcopal Churches, despite dogmatic differences among them. The spontaneous surmise is that the Eucharist, founded as it is, by the 'Founder Himself', supplies the structure and support for the growth of Christian life. This requires explicitation. By participating in the Eucharistic Sacrament, the 'beings' at large 'let in' the 'One Eternal Being'. How? it may be asked. The Latin term 'Sacrum Convivium', explains it best. That is, by taking part in the Eucharist, the egocentric selfhood is sublimated. It is rather reconciled, first with the community and subsequently with God. In this Sacrament, the priest and the congregation

together become one body and thus effectualise the ethos of the Ecclesia. As St. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 10:17 "We, who are many, are One body, for we partake of the same loaf". This is the transfiguration of humanity or deification, as patristic proclamations preach. The spiritual effect of this holy Sacrament transcends human comprehension. As in 'Jacob's ladder', the ethereal descends to the earthy and the earthy is elevated to the ethereal. This Sacrament is substantially the Sacrament of 'Corpus Christi', the body of Christ. It is the Sacrament in which Christ the King and the High Priest offers Himself as the host for the salvation of humanity.

#### 24. Sacrament of Matrimony- "They are no longer two"

"Whom God hath joined, man shall not render asunder". This is not a casual comment but a definite decree of Christ. Verses 2 to 8 which precede the above command in Chapter 10 of Mk, and verses 3 to 12 of Mt. 19 would speak sufficiently on the views of Christ, regarding the solemnity of matrimony. Briefly, the teaching of Jesus on marriage focuses on its unity and indissolubility. In Mt. 27, He forbids the desire for another's wife. Surely, Jesus frowns upon extra-marital relationship, polygamy and polyandry. The Nazarene has no doubt at all that marriage is a divine dispensation from the very beginning of Creation itself. Christ was absolutely certain that once the nuptial ceremony is over, the husband and wife are no longer two but one or 'one flesh' as the Greek version puts it. Marriage is really a spiritual union of blood with blood and flesh with flesh. Therefore, Jesus was categorical in His contention that permanence of marriage is what is willed by God. As a sequel, He overrules the Jewish practice which had approved divorce on certain grounds. To Christ, the union in marriage is indissoluble and irrevocable. In Mk 10: 11-12 and Lk 16: 16 Jesus deprecates, if not denounces, divorce, in no unmitigating manner. Biblical scholars are of the opinion that the pure and pious Christian populace of the primitive period unflinchingly

followed the precepts of Jesus, as contained in Mark and Luke. The 'permission' that Christ is said to have granted for divorce on the ground of unchastity or 'fornication' as recorded in Mt. 5:32, reflects, how His teachings were adapted and applied by Jewish converts to Christianity, who were under the spell of Mosaic Law and had not got over its hangover. Not only the sayings of Christ, but His actions too, seal marriage with the imprint of divine design, even though obviously it is a 'man-made' arrangement and 'natural institution' as old as the hills. The allusion here is apparently to the miracle of Jesus at Cana in converting water into wine, which incident has been poetically put by the burgeoning poet Byron during his University days in the following immortal and moving words. 'Water saw its Lord and blushed'. A point for reflection emerges here. The action of Jesus at Cana is acclaimed as the first miracle in His public ministry. The question is as to why did He choose 'his hour' for performing a miracle, on the occasion of 'a marriage' which by all practical parameters is a 'profane' one. The answer that it is accidental, is too commonplace. With his natural incisiveness and insight, Luther has come out with a sound argument. Although Luther denies the sacramental aspect of marriage, he is all out to extol its importance as a 'divine ordinance'. He further writes that God did bless the married state above all others. Once it is accepted that Christ is God Incarnate, all else is theologically deducible. It is part of Providence that Jesus invoked His own 'grace' on marriage ceremony, lest it will be treated as a man-made contrivance merely to gratify carnal desire or concupiscence. For Jesus it is a divine device, whereby the selfhood of a spouse is abnegated in absorption in the other and the 'two in one' would voluntarily become instruments in the Divine plan of perpetuating creative activity. The presence and actions of Jesus at the wedding at Cana are reckoners of the divine design and guidance in the marriages which the children of Adam celebrate even to this day.

## 25. Marriage confers medicinal grace

Valuing the views of the Master and the Apostles, the Church Fathers brought in a sublime conception on matrimony. While the OT prophets like Isaiah, Hosea and Ezekiel used 'marriage imagery' as a means of revealing Yahweh's inexhaustible love to Israel, His chosen people, the imagery received a wider compass in the hands of the Fathers. For them, it becomes a sign and symbol of love between God the Creator and the entire created beings. It is interpreted as a spiritual relationship, full of grace and mystery, transcending human understanding. St. Benevventure expressed that "marriage conferred 'medical grace' which calmed sexual desire and kept it within limits of fidelity." In Dem. XVIII, 836-7 Aphrahat, mentions 'marriage' among the good things God has created. Robert Murray in his book 'Symbols of Church and Kingdom' cites Ephrem's view against the Maricionite sect, that 'marriage', family and possession are 'lawful'. In defence of the Oriental thinking, especially of Semitic writers, Murray mentions elsewhere, that the thought of these authors are not to be rendered in categories that go back to Greek philosophical methods.

## 26. Evolution of the concept of Marriage

A vivid picture of early Christian ideals on marriage is available from the writings of Peter and Paul. In 1 Peter: 3, instructions on the mutual relationship of the spouses are given in very candid terms. Paul reinforces the idea of divorce as unacceptable. In 1 Cor. 7, he eloquently argues against the breaking up of marriage among the believers. This chapter contains both the expressed and implied doctrines on marital relationship. The Sacramental character of marriage is elucidated in the fifth chapter of Pauline epistle to Ephesians. Ignatius of Antioch held that the permission of a bishop was required for making a marriage valid. But the bull of Ignatius was not observed strictly, as the then Christians were governed by the inflexible Roman Law. According to which the 'consent' of the parties to the marriage was the most essential thing for its validity. So a few centuries

elapsed without any specific religious rite or ritual of marriage. Again, it was not obligatory at this period to solemnise marriage in churches. Nevertheless, the remark of Tertullian is a pointer on the view of the theologians on matrimony. He writes, "How shall we ever be able to describe adequately the happiness of marriage which the Church unites, which the oblation confirms...." Next to St. Paul, it was Augustine who developed the understanding of marriage as a Sacrament. He asserted that marriage is a Sacrament as it symbolises the union between Christ and the Church. Two specific advantages of marriage were identified by him. Firstly, it discouraged the parties to marriage, from seeking sexual satisfaction elsewhere. Marriage, thus prevents humans from falling into sexual licentiousness. Secondly, it fosters the 'family' which is the forum for 'faith building' in children. Regarding divorce and remarriage, his humane disposition impelled Augustine to state that the innocent party could send away the culprit, but could not remarry. In the code of Emperor Justin, promulgated in A.D 542, for the Eastern Roman Empire, divorce and remarriage were permitted. The Greek East is still following this. By about the 8th century, benediction by a cleric became a condition for marriages to be ecclesiastically recognized. Another development also took place. Marriages began to be conducted in the churches. The first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charlemagne, decreed in the 9th century, against divorce and remarriage which had crept into Christianity due to pagan practices. Pope Alexander III's decree of the 12th century, is a landmark in the concept of marriage as a Sacrament. According to it, the basis for valid marriage was declared to be the 'mutual consent' or the 'plighted troth' of the parties to marriage. This establishes the unbreakable characteristic of marriage. Taking recourse to Pauline philosophy, marriage was once again declared to be the reflection of the eternal union between

Christ the Bridegroom and Church the Bride, and hence indissoluble. To allay the prevailing apprehension that sexual relationship is sinful, the Ecclesial hierarchy reiterated that it is a Sacrament, sanctified by Christ Himself, as the High Priest. That is the implication, of the words 'Whom God hath joined' in the command of Christ. Therefore, it was impressed by the authorities that marriages solemnised in a church, by a priest, implied that all what happened in wedlock were good. Sexual union of the duly married couple is thus given a spiritual dimension. It is hailed as an act for the purging of the soul, replenishment for the body and an act whereby the mortal co-operates with the Divine, in the act of 'creation'. Naturally, more than the 'plighted troth', sexual union became the condition of consummation of marriage. So the Roman Canon Law holds that, even while divorce is not permissible, ecclesiastical sanction can be granted for invalidating marriage, if sexual union has not taken place. The Syrian Orthodox Church permits 'divorce' on certain grounds, specified in its canon called 'Hudaya Canon' authored by Gregorius Bar Hebraeus, the 13th century Catholicos. This is detailed very clearly, in the catechetical book, named 'Mathopadesasaram' cited already. A Dominican theologian of Spain, by name Melchior Cano, brought out a theory in the 16th century, separating the sacramental and contractual aspects in marriage. This was made use of by many a European government as a plea and defence to bring in civil legislation to regulate Christian marriages. Pope Leo XIII, thereupon decreed, in 1880, that in 'Christian Marriage' there is no distinction between contract and sacrament. This exactly is the theology of the Syrian Orthodox Church. In the Encyclical 'Castic connubi' of Pope Pius XI, the intimate life - partnership and association involved in the holy matrimony is emphasised. Further, it acknowledges the primary purpose of procreation and the essential end of educating the offsprings, inculcating

religious values. Avoiding the term 'contract' as it is too legalistic and juristic in tenor, Vat II employs the Biblical phrase 'covenant' to signify marriage, as this term brings out the intimacy in marital relationship.

### **27. Mutual consent and 'plighted troth' in Marriage**

In marriage, the 'matter' is the 'mutual consent', by the spouses. This may be accompanied by exchange of rings or joining of hands or by any other external act resulting from inculturation. For instance, a practice prevalent among the Syrian Orthodox Christians of India may be mentioned. A small talisman made of gold, with a cross engraved on it is tied around the neck of the bride using a cotton thread. This has been acknowledged as the result of the influence of a Hindu custom. For the Syrian Orthodox Christians elsewhere, this custom is not in vogue. The marriage ceremony of the Syrian Orthodox Church has two parts. The first one is betrothal. It is by the benediction and exchange of rings, denoting 'mutual consent' of the spouses. As there is no legal format for 'mutual consent' within the frame of the marriage service, this is to be deemed to form part of the matrimony, by implication. The second part is called the 'crowning ceremony' where 'heavenly crowns' are placed symbolically on the heads of the spouses. Undoubtedly, a very meaningful ceremony of the celestial sanction for the union in marriage. Unlike in the present period, these two services were held separately in former times. Among the Westerners, the solemnisation is by the parties themselves; the cleric is only a witness, while for the Easterners it is by the officiating clergyman, who is both the witness as well as the officiator. The 'form' of the marriage is by the exchanging of the vows or 'plighted troth', in the presence of witness. The parties to the marriage pray for the inward and spiritual grace, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, to enable them to keep the vows in their life time, firmly and faithfully.

## **28. Family, the Domestic Ecclesia**

Among the Episcopal Churches, marriage is not a mere contract. Nor is it an arrangement for division of labour or exchange of rights and duties. It is rather an intimate partnership of life and love as Lord Christ has visualised. The grace of marriage is an aid to constant companionship, unalloyed affection and unhampered happiness. By assigning Sacramental status to marriage, the Ecclesia has made it a bridgehead, a gateway or a channel of divine grace. Verily, through this Sacrament flows the perennial benediction on the 'family' which is also called 'domestic Ecclesia' or 'Church in miniature', as well as the nursery for inculcating Christian values in the young ones. What, Count Cavour, the Italian nation builder, commented on the family is worthy of quoting here. 'Man learns the first lessons of citizenship, between the mother's kiss and the father's caress'. The 'natural institution' called marriage, is understood by Christianity as a divine device, a sacred Sacrament, in the light of the teaching of Christ and the preaching of the god-intoxicated prelates of the Ecclesia. In conclusion, what, even the Protestant theologian John Macquarrie emphasises, is to be incorporated. "In taking marriage into the Sacramental structure, the Church has broken down the barrier between the sacred and the secular and provides for the impact of the divine grace upon our everyday activities".

## **29. Sacrament of anointing the Sick - Jesus went about healing**

"He came, He consoled and He cured". This was concisely the healing ministry of Christ. Jesus was neither apathetic not indifferent to human sufferings, like the stoics of Greece or the philosophers of the Orient. Christ's ministry was virtually one of healing. Even a cursory glance of the synoptic gospels would convince, that one third of their narratives deals with the healing ministry of the Nazerene. Mt. 4:23-4 tells how Jesus went about all Galilee, healing every disease and every infirmity among

the people. Chap. 9:6 of the same Gospel speaks of the assuredness and the authority with which Christ cured the lame. In fact, healing was part of His mission of the remission of sins. On many an occasion, Jesus made use of healing as a sign and symbol of salvation from the scourge of sin. This was mainly due to the influence of the then prevailing theology of Judaism, that sickness was the 'wage' of sin. Jn. 9:2 is an epitome of this thinking. In His eagerness to work out wholeness to the whole of humanity, Jesus gave the Apostles the power to cure diseases, before He sent them to the ends of the world on the errand of evangelisation. This is narrated in Lk 9:1-2. Mt. 10:1 and Mk 6:7, also describe that Jesus enjoined the ministry of healing on the Apostles. The last words of Jesus, as recorded in Mk 16:17-18, are classic commentaries of this mission. "..... they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover". Of course, Christ here specifies only the effect of the rite as a result of 'grace'. The mode of administering the rite, Jesus must have left to the Apostles and the Ecclesia. The Catholic Encyclopaedia comments: 'Since anointing with oil had a recognized therapeutic value among the jews, it is entirely plausible that the Apostles called this as the sign'.

### **30. The Church is fulfilling the mission of the Master**

The healing ministry was a common feature during the Apostolic period. Acts 3, 8 and 28, give accounts of the healings, performed by Peter, Philip and Paul. What the Church performs through the anointing of the sick, is nothing but the fulfilment of the mission of the Master and the deeds of the disciples. James 5:14-15 picturesquely describe the ritual of 'anointing the sick with oil' and its effects of curing sickness and forgiving sins. It is probable that St. James might have expounded this doctrine, due to the influence of the passage in Lev. 14:10-31, wherein anointing of lepers with oil is related to the forgiveness of sins. The passage of James cited above, is the key text for the Ecclesia to call this rite, a Sacrament. On analysis, the following deductions can be drawn from

these words of James. Firstly, the remark that the elders have to 'pray over and anoint the sick in the name of the Lord', established the fact that this is very much a 'religious act and not a medical one', as Rev. Liam Kelly opines in his article on the 'Anointment of the Sick'. Secondly, there is absolutely no mention at all that this Sacrament can be administered only to a sick person whose end is drawing near. The final conclusion is that sins are absolved by anointment. On the evidence of the various passages cited, it can be surmised safely that this Sacrament has its basis in the NT. The 8th century hagiographer Bede the Venerable, who is the author of the earliest extant commentary on James, affirms that, what the Apostle had presented regarding anointment was followed by the Church since then. No wonder, the Council of Trent stated, "this holy anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ".

### **31. 'Anointing', 'Extreme Unction' and 'Care of the Sick'**

There are mainly three sources for gathering the 'growth and evolution' of this Sacrament. They may be enumerated as Patristic Literature, the Biographies of Saints and Liturgical Texts. It is to be admitted that there are only scanty references about the Sacrament in the writings of early Fathers like Aphrahat the Wise, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria. However, a letter written in 416 by Pope Innocent I to Decentius, Bishop of Gubbio in Italy, is an important document. Relying on the preachings of Christ and St. James he argues, that the 'oil' consecrated by a bishop can be administered both by the clergy and the laity as a Sacrament, as it has the 'grace' of the Holy Spirit. The practice of the lay people anointing the sick, however, came to a close by the 8th century. Biographical sketches, of certain holymen and women, mention that they used to anoint the sick with oil. Possidius, the first biographer of St. Augustine, informs that the saint used to visit the sick, laid his hands upon them and probably anointed them with oil.

Aquinas tells the story of Saint Genevieve of Paris, who in the 4th century used to visit and anoint the sick with the oil blessed by the bishop, and in this way she healed many people. Important Liturgical texts of the early period provide the prayers, invocations and the rituals in consecrating the oil. Reference must be made to the 'Apostolic Tradition' of Hippolytus and the 'Euchalogian' of the 4th century Serapion. It is surely surprising that although centuries have elapsed, little change has been made in the formula of Serapion as found in the Roman Pontifical. Certain significant changes came in, by the 9th century. This Sacrament began to be treated as one for forgiveness rather than healing. A logical sequence was that it was clericalised, as remission of sins was the prerogative of the clergy. With the dominance of Scholasticism in the 12th century, yet another thinking also influenced the concept of this Sacrament. It began to be called the Sacrament for the dying or 'Extreme Unction'. It was Peter Lombard of France, who called it so for the first time. St. Albert the great, Aquinas, Bonaventure and Duns Scots, developed this doctrine. Prayers of healing were dropped from the rituals. Certain practical considerations also prompted the people to put this off to the dying state, and so to refer it as the 'Extreme Unction'. One such reason was the burdensome penance prescribed by the Church after confession, which was necessary before receiving unction. Yet another was, the popular view that, the one who recovered after the unction, could not marry again. The Council of Trent did not demand 'danger of death' as a condition for the validity of the Sacrament. In the early decades of the 20th century, challenges arose in the Roman Church, in calling the Sacrament 'Extreme Unction'. Biblical scholars argued that the narratives with which the NT depicts death, are positive ones as against the sombre and saddening Litanies of the funeral rites of the Church. As a result Vat II ushered in a salutary view on this Sacrament. The Council declared that the Sacrament may 'more fittingly be called Anointing of the sick'. In 1972 Pope Paul VI caused core changes in the nomenclature and concept of the Sacrament. He decreed that the

ministry is to be called the 'care of the sick'. Therefore, it should be administered at the beginning of the illness. And the ministry should provide an assurance to the sick that he or she is not abandoned to fate, but cared for as a member of the Ecclesia, not only in this life, but in the life to come, if the inevitable happened.

### **32. Greater appreciation by Protestants**

Eastern Orthodox Churches, except the Nestorians, recognise this as a Sacrament. For the Orthodox, the principal effect of the Sacrament is regaining of physical and mental health. Among the Coptic Church, the practice of assembling the sick in churches on Monday of the Holy Week, to receive the Sacrament still survives. Luther's view is quite interesting. In his 'Babylonian Captivity', he 'allows the anointing' of one who desired it, subject to the condition that the recipient should not assert that the peace and forgiveness that it may bring, did not come from its sacramental nature. But his thesis seems to acknowledge that 'anointing' stimulates the sick. The convocations of Canterbury and York in England in 1925, approved a 'form of unction and laying of hands'. The revised Scottish and American Prayer Book, published in 1929, provides for the option to receive the rite. It is not presumptuous to proclaim that, with the increasing recognition that many diseases have psycho-somatic causes and characters, the significance of this ancient Sacrament of 'anointing the sick' is gaining greater appreciation even by the Protestant brethren.

### **33. Physical disability, no impediment**

In this Sacrament the 'matter' is the 'laying on of the hands' or as an alternative, the 'anointed oil'. The 'form' is the 'prayer for healing'. Regarding the effect of the Sacrament, the following is the summary. The Ecclesial stand is that sickness is the loss of integrity of the spiritual and the corporal aspects in human beings. The Sacrament invokes for the regaining of the lost disharmony between the two, primarily by instilling confidence in the

healing power of Christ. This Sacrament imprints such 'grace' on the sick that he or she does not deem physical debility as an impediment for the union with Christ. The sick is conditioned to conform to and draw comfort from the dying Christ, who subdued the body by the power of the spirit, if the inevitable is to befall. Emphatically this Sacrament reminds, that death is not the end but the gateway for a life to eternity, in the eternal loving care of the Creator.

#### **34. From the cradle to the grave and beyond**

The spectrum of the Sacramental structure of the Ecclesia spans the life of the individual, from the cradle to the grave and beyond. Every child of the 'Holy Mother Church' can aver therefore that the Ecclesia has been 'the consolation of my life and she would be the consolation of my death too'. At every situation or station of life, the specific 'Sacrament' aims at emulating Christ and effecting union with the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit through the grace of the Triune God. This truly is a marvellous mystery of the dominical design of the Most Blessed Trinity.

## CONCLUSION

"Quo Vadis?" or to be more exact, "Domine, quo vadis?" asked Simon Peter to his Master Christ. The meaning of the question is "Lord, where are you going?" This narrative is from the apocryphal 'Acts of Peter' composed around A.D. 190 probably in Palestine or Syria. On this anecdote, a legend developed during the patristic period and is referred to by Origen and St. Ambrose of Milan.

The legend may be summarised as follows. Peter was fleeing from Rome to escape the persecution of Nero, the Emperor. Seized with fear he was running along the path known 'Via Appia Antica' or the Old Way. Peter chances to meet a person, carrying a cross on his shoulder, coming towards him. Simon stared at him. The man with the cross also cast a piercing look in exchange. Their eyes met. Peter instantaneously recognized the 'man' and accosted him "Lord! whither goest thou?" Jesus answered: 'I go to Rome to be crucified'. The perplexed Peter probed. 'What! Master art thou being crucified again'? Christ replied: 'Yes Peter, I am being crucified again'! Words surcharged with emotion. A shudder passed through Simon Peter. Remorse filled him as he realised that the Master spoke those words to admonish him for his cowardice if not disloyalty. Tradition goes that when Peter came to himself, he returned to Rome and joyfully courted martyrdom. According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, 'Ambrose used the anecdote to show that as Peter stood firmly with the Church, Ambrose would stand with the Church of Milan against Arianism'.

The plight of many a modern Christian is not much different from that

of Peter who took to flight in fright. Christ, the Bridegroom and His Bride the Church, our 'Mother' are guiding each one of us through the following advice. 'Dear Child does it meet you to be like the seeds, which though springs up soon, are scorched within a short time as they have no roots. Your mind shall not be vexed. Believe our words and have faith'. It is imperative that we pay heed to this counsel as expatiated by St. Paul in Heb. 12:1. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witness... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us".

Never shall any child of the Sacred Ecclesia disregard, disrespect or disobey the commands of Christ the Lord and the mandates of the 'Mother Church'. There must not be any occasion for Christ and the Church to ask any one of their sons or daughters the piercing and paining question "Quo Vadis?"

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